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SF MASTERWORKS

Always Coming Home

URSULA K. LE GUIN



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INTRODUCTION

by John Scalzi

Maps, Facts, Gestalts and Le Guin

As a child I loved two things with a curious passion: maps and facts. Maps I loved, I suppose, for the same reason so many people love them: They establish a place, a world, which you may or may not be part of, but which is known, to a point. There's always a border, an edge, a place where things are no longer known but can only be speculated about – often famously notated as “here be dragons” but enticing even when simply left blank.

Maps didn't have to be of faraway places for them to work their magic on me; in fact one of my favourite maps of all time was the Thomas Bros. street guide, a spiral-bound book that covered all of Los Angeles county, where I lived and grew up. I could open up to the page that contained the street I lived on – Edna Place, in Covina – and follow the map to the edge, which featured an arrow telling me which other page held the map contiguous to that one, on which I could continue my journey. Page to page to page, through towns I knew – Azusa, Glendora, West Covina! – and towns I didn't, with exotic names like Rosemead, Pasadena and Burbank, eventually reaching to the sprawl of Los Angeles, and then to the sea, or to a border the map could not take me past: “See Thomas Guide for Orange County.” So many worlds, held in other books, with other maps. I could spend hours wondering about what life was like in the places the Thomas Guide would not go.

Facts, and the books that laid them out, I loved mostly for two reasons, one I would have been able to articulate when I was a child, and one I could not. The one I could articulate was simple: Things to learn. Things to know. In small bits so I could carry them in my

brain when I was eight or ten or fifteen. As a child I loved knowing things; I was small and insecure in many ways, so knowing things was something I could use as a defence: *Yes, but do you know all the names of the Galilean moons of Jupiter? Well? Do you?* But even without that, the joy of knowing was its own reward. I saw the world better than others, armed with knowledge – or thought I did, which when you're eight or ten or fifteen is good enough.

The reason I would not have been able to articulate as a child is that books of fact gave me a gestalt. Pile enough facts about a topic, or a place or a thing in one place and at one time, and patterns emerge; a larger understanding of the topic, place or thing itself forms, a structure on which to hang thoughts and suppositions. Note well that this pattern should not be assumed to be organic – that facts did not spontaneously arrange themselves into a book, but were placed there by a person, an author or editor, who had intent, even if the intent was something as simple as "I want this book to sell a ton of copies." Regardless, pick up a book of fact – or any book where the narrative is ostensibly less important than the presentation of information – and start reading, and whether you're aware of it or not, a narrative, a worldview, a gestalt, will eventually present itself.

These are two facts about me that are important know, because they explain why *Always Coming Home* affected me as much as it did when I picked it up as a teenager, in the paperback edition with the owl floating above a green and pleasant valley.

First, it was not a straightforward narrative. While there is a narrative in it, and a critical one – the life of Stone Telling, who leaves the valley of her birth to travel with her father, experiences his world and then returns to her own – it was a book that rewarded simply opening up to a random page, to read a poem, or a story, or an explanation of life among the Kesh, a people who, as the book's first note puts it, "might be going to have lived a long, long time from now." Drop in here. Drop in there. Drop in enough times in enough places and you get a gestalt – a sense of place, and of a world created by intent by Ursula Le Guin.

To be sure, *Le Guin* is a masterful world builder, so canny that even as a character in her own book, the hand-wringing Pandora, the world nevertheless feels as if it was discovered and described rather than built. Maybe that's because *Le Guin* knows the limits

of world building – knows what to put in, knows what to leave out, what to evoke and what to say out loud.

For years, I would dip into this world: read a little bit about it, read a little bit of Stone Telling's journey, read the bits in the Back of the Book, and then step back out, to think about this place that was progressively becoming more real in my mind. A place where I could start in one spot and walk, up and around and out a spiral arm to another place where the border was left blank. Here be not dragons, but the rest of the world, passing beyond knowledge.

The gestalt of the book became a map, in other words, to explore within and imagine without.

And strangely enough, it was a map of a place I knew! Of California, my home state, of places I had been and I had known all my life, either by visiting or having been shown them in school. A world and a map overlaid on the one I already had, a place and people and way of life simultaneous in my brain with the places and people I knew and the life I lived. The juxtaposition not creating cognitive dissonance but an understanding that there was more than one way to live a life, that the Kesh and the others in *Le Guin's* world were no better or worse (on average) than we were, even if they saw us as if we had our heads on backwards. They might be right about that. But neither are they perfect. At one point, Pandora complains bitterly about the utopia of the book, and is admonished, gently, for it. The admonisher is correct. It only looks like a utopia from here, and only if you don't look too closely. Look closer, and it's just – if "just" is the right word – another California, in another time, with another way to live.

It's a California and a time and a way to live that I love, however. I'm forever grateful to Ursula Le Guin for the map, and facts, and the gestalt and most of all for the book, this book, so different from all the other science fiction books that I had read to that point. It's a book I've kept with me, and a formative book for me. Ursula Le Guin and I don't write much alike, I will note, and I don't know if I *could* write a book like this. It doesn't mean it's not sunk deep in my bones, or that I don't come back to it, to revisit the world and explore the map once more. I always come home to it.

This is a wonderful book. Explore it for yourself.

John Scalzi

A First Note

THE PEOPLE IN this book might be going to have lived a long, long time from now in Northern California.

The main part of the book is their voices speaking for themselves in stories and life-stories, plays, poems, and songs. If the reader will bear with some unfamiliar terms they will all be made clear at last. Coming at my work as a novelist, I thought it best to put many of the explanatory, descriptive pieces into a section called The Back of the Book, where those who want narrative can ignore them and those who enjoy explanations can find them. The glossary may also be useful or amusing.

The difficulty of translation from a language that doesn't yet exist is considerable, but there's no need to exaggerate it. The past, after all, can be quite as obscure as the future. The ancient Chinese book called *Tao teh ching* has been translated into English dozens of times, and indeed the Chinese have to keep retranslating it into Chinese at every cycle of Cathay, but no translation can give us the book that Lao Tze (who may not have existed) wrote. All we have is the *Tao teh ching* that is here, now. And so with translations from a literature of the (or a) future. The fact that it hasn't yet been written, the mere absence of a text to translate, doesn't make all that much difference. What was and what may be lie, like children whose faces we cannot see, in the arms of silence. All we ever have is here, now.

THE QUAIL SONG

From the Summer Dance.

In the fields by the river
from the meadows by the river
from the fields by the river
in the meadows by the river
two quail run

Run two quail
rise two quail
two quail run
two quail rise
from the meadows by the river

Towards an Archaeology of the Future



HOW THE PATIENT scientist feels when the shapeless tussocks and vague ditches under the thistles and scrub begin to take shape and come clear: this was the outer rampart—this the gateway—that was the granary! We'll dig here, and here, and after that I want a look at that lumpy bit on the slope.... How they know true glory when a thin disk slips through the fingers with the sifted dirt, and cleared with the swipe of a thumb shows, stamped in the fragile bronze, the horned god! How I envy them their shovels and sieves and tape measures, all their tools, and their wise, expert hands that touch and hold what they find! Not for long; they'll give it to the museum, of course; but they did hold it for a moment in their hands.

I found, at last, the town I had been hunting for. After digging in several wrong places for over a year and persisting in several blockheaded opinions—that it must be walled, with one gate, for instance—I was studying yet once more the contours of my map of the region, when it dawned as slowly and certainly as the sun itself upon me that the town was *there*, between the creeks, under my feet the whole time. And there was never a wall, what on earth did they need a wall for? What I had taken for the gate was the bridge across the meeting of the creeks. And the sacred buildings and the dancing place not in the center of town, for the center is the Hinge, but over in their own arm of the double spiral, the right arm, of course—there in the pasture below the barn. And so it is, and so it is.

But I can't go digging there and hope to find the curved fragment of a roof tile, the iridescent foot of a wine goblet, the ceramic cap of a solar battery, or a little coin of the gold of California, the same, for gold rusts not, that was weighed out in Placerville and spent on whores or real estate in Frisco and then perhaps was a wedding ring awhile and

then went hidden in a vault deeper than the mine it came from until all security proved illfounded, and now reshaped, this time round, into a curl-rayed sun and given in honor to a skilful artisan: no, I won't find that. It isn't here. That little sun of gold is not, as they say, dwelling in the Houses of the Earth. It is in thin air, in the wilderness that lies beyond this day and night, the Houses of the Sky. My gold is in the shards of the broken pot at the end of the rainbow. Dig there! What will you find? Seeds. Seeds of the wild oats.

I can walk in the wild oats and the thistles, between the houses of the little town I was looking for, Sinshan. I can cross the Hinge and come onto the dancing place. There, about where that Valley oak is now, will be Obsidian, in the northeast; the Blue Clay quite close to it, dug into the hillside, the northwest; closer to me, towards the center, Serpentine of the Four Directions; then the two Adobes on a curve down towards the creek, southeast, southwest. They'll have to drain this field, if they build the heyimas, as I think they do, underground, only the pyramidal roofs with their clerestories elevated, and the ornamented ends of the entrance ladder sticking out of the top. I can see that well enough. All kinds of seeing with the mind's eye is allowed me here. I can stand here in the old pasture where there's nothing but sun and rain, wild oats and thistles and crazy salsify, no cattle grazing, only deer, stand here and shut my eyes and see: the dancing place, the stepped pyramid roofs, a moon of beaten copper on a high pole over the Obsidian. If I listen, can I hear voices with the inner ear? Could you hear voices, Schliemann, in the streets of Troy? If you did, you were crazy too. The Trojans had all been dead three thousand years. Which is farther from us, farther out of reach, more silent—the dead, or the unborn? Those whose bones lie under the thistles and the dirt and the tombstones of the Past, or those who slip weightless among molecules, dwelling where a century passes in a day, among the fair folk, under the great, bell-curved Hill of Possibility?

There's no way to reach that lot by digging. They have no bones. The only human bones in this pasture would be those of the first-corners, and they did not bury here, and left no tombs or tiles or shards or walls or coins behind them. If they had a town here it was made of what the woods and fields are made of, and is gone. One may listen, but all the words of their language are gone, gone utterly. They worked obsidian, and that stays; down there at the edge of the rich man's airport there was a workshop, and you can pick up plenty of chipped pieces, though no one has found a finished point for years. There is no other trace of them. They owned their Valley very lightly, with easy hands. They walked softly here. So will the others, the ones I seek.

The only way I can think to find them, the only archaeology that

might be practical, is as follows: You take your child or grandchild in your arms, a young baby, not a year old yet, and go down into the wild oats in the field below the barn. Stand under the oak on the last slope of the hill, facing the creek. Stand quietly. Perhaps the baby will see something, or hear a voice, or speak to somebody there, somebody from home.





The Small Winery at Sinshan

STONE TELLING

PART I



STONE TELLING IS my last name. It has come to me of my own choosing, because I have a story to tell of where I went when I was young; but now I go nowhere, sitting like a stone in this place, in this ground, in this Valley. I have come where I was going.

My House is the Blue Clay, my household the High Porch of Sinshan.

My mother was named Towhee, Willow, and Ashes. My father's name, Abhao, in the Valley means Kills.

In Sinshan babies' names often come from birds, since they are messengers. In the month before my mother bore me, an owl came every night to the oak trees called Garra outside the windows of High Porch House, on the north side, and sang the owl's song there; so my first name was North Owl.

High Porch is an old house, well-built, with large rooms; the beams and frame are redwood, the walls of adobe brick and plaster, the flooring oak, the windows of clear glass in small square panes. The balconies of High Porch are deep and beautiful. The great-grandmother of my grandmother was the first to live in our rooms, on the first floor, under the roof, when the family was big they needed the whole floor, but my grandmother was the only one of her generation, and so we lived in the two west rooms only. We could not give much. We had the use of ten wild olives and several other gathering trees on Sinshan Ridge and a seed-clearing on the east side of Wakyahum, and planted potatoes and corn and vegetables in one of the plots on the creek southeast of Adobe Hill, but we took much more corn and beans from the storehouses than we gave. My grandmother Valiant was a weaver. When I was a small child she had no sheep in the family, and so gave most of what she

wove for wool to weave more. The first thing I remember of being alive is that my grandmother's fingers moved across the warp of the loom, forth and back, a silver crescent bracelet shining on her wrist below the red sleeve.

The second thing I remember is that I went up to the spring of our creek in the fog in early morning in the winter. It was my first time as a Blue Clay child to dip up water for the new-moon wakwa. I was so cold I cried. The older children laughed at me and said I had spoiled the water by crying into it. I believed them, and began to bawl because I had spoiled the water. My grandmother was officiating, and she told me the water was all right, and let me carry the moon-jar all the way back to town; but I bawled and snivelled all the way, because I was cold and ashamed and the jar of spring water was cold and heavy. I can feel that cold and wet and weight now in old age, and see the dead arms of manzanita black in fog, and hear the voices laughing and talking before me and behind me on the steep path beside the creek.

I go there, I go there.

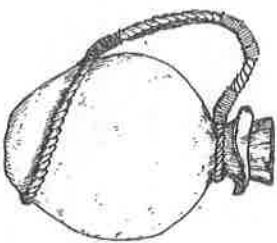
I go where I went

Crying beside the water.

It goes there, it goes there,

The fog along the water.

I did not spend much time crying; maybe not enough. My mother's father said, "Laugh first, cry later; cry first, laugh later." He was a Serpentine man from Chumo, and had gone back to that town to live with his mother's people. That was all right with my grandmother. She said once, "Living with my husband is like eating unleached acorns." But she went down to visit him from time to time in Chumo, and he would come and stay with us in the hills in summer, when Chumo was baking like a biscuit down on the Valley floor. His sister Green Drum was a famous Summer dancer, but his family never gave anything. He said they



were poor because his mother and grandmother had given everything in past years putting on the Summer dances at Chumo. My grandmother said they were poor because they didn't like working. They may both have been right.

The only other human people directly in my family lived in Madidinou. My grandmother's sister had gone there to live, and her son had married a Red Adobe woman there. We often visited, and I played with my second cousins, a girl and boy called Pelican and Hops.

Our family animals when I was a small child were himpi, poultry, and a cat. Our cat was black without a white hair, handsome, mannerly, and a great hunter. We traded her kittens for himpi, so that for a while we had a big pen of himpi. I looked after them and the chickens, and kept cats out of the runs and pens down under the lower balconies. When I began staying with the animals I was still so small that the green-tailed cock frightened me. He knew it, and would come at me jerking his neck and swearing, and I would scramble over the divider into the himpi run to escape him. The himpi would come out and sit up and whistle at me. They were a comfort to me, even more than kittens. I learned not to name them, and not to trade them alive for eating, but to kill quickly those I traded, since some people kill animals without care or skill, causing fear and pain. I cried enough to suit even my grandfather, after the night a sheepdog went amok and got into the run and slaughtered every himpi but a few nestlings. I could not speak to a dog for months after that. But it turned out well for my family: since the sheepdog's people gave us a ewe in lamb to make up for the loss of our himpi. The ewe bore twin ewe lambs, and so my mother was a shepherd again, and my grandmother had family wool to spin and weave.

I do not remember learning to read and dance; my grandmother was teaching me from before the time I began to speak and walk. When I was five I began going to the heyimas with the other Blue Clay children, Blood, Oak, and Mole Lodges; I learned the Salt Journey; I studied a little with the poet Ite, and a long time with the potter Clay Sun. I was not quick to learn, and never considered going to a school in one of the great towns, though several children of Sinshan did so. I liked learning in the heyimas, taking part in a structure larger than my own knowledge, in which I could find relief from feelings of fear and anger which unaided I could not understand or get past. Yet I did not learn as much as I might have done, but always hung back, and said, "I can't do that."

Some of the children, illmeaning or ignorant, called me Hwtkmas, "half-House." I had also heard people say of me, "She is half a person." I understood this in my own way, badly, since it was not explained to me at home. I had not the courage to ask questions at the heyimas, or to go where I might have learned about matters outside the little town



of Sinshan, and begun to see the Valley as a part of a whole as well as a whole. Since neither my mother nor her mother spoke of him, in the first years of my life all I knew of my father was that he had come from outside the Valley and had gone away again. This meant to me only that I had no father's mother, no father's House, and therefore was a half-person. I had not even heard of the Condor people. I had lived eight years before we went to the hot springs in Kasto-hana to treat my grandmother's rheumatism, and in the common place there saw men of the Condor.

I will tell that journey. It was a small journey many years ago. It is a journey of the still air.

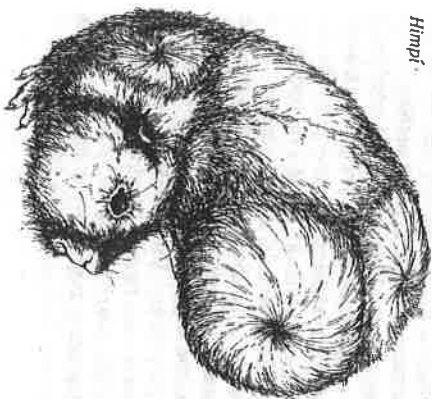
We got up in the darkness of a morning about a month past the World Dance. I gave some meat I had saved to the black cat Sidi, who was growing old. I had thought she would be hungry while we were away, and the thought had worried me for days. My mother told me, "You eat that. The cat will catch what she needs!" My mother was stern and reasoning. My grandmother said, "The child is feeding her soul. Let be."

We put out the hearthfire and left the door open a little for the cat and the wind. We went down the stairs under the last stars; the houses looked like hills in the darkness, dark. Out on the common place it seemed lighter. We crossed the Hinge and went to the Blue Clay heyimas. Shell was waiting for us there; she was a member of the Doctors Lodge and had treated my grandmother's pain, and they were old friends. They filled the water basin and sang the Return together. When we came up into the dancing place the light was beginning. Shell came back across the Hinge with us and through town, and after we crossed the bridge over Sinshan Creek we all squatted there under the live oaks and pissed, and said, "Go well! Stay well!" laughing. That was how Lower Valley people used to do when they left on a journey, but only old people remember it now. Then Shell went back and we went on past the barns, between the creeks, across Sinshan Fields. The sky above the hills across the Valley began to be yellow and red; where we were in the middle the woods and hills were green; behind us Sinshan Mountain was blue and dark. So we walked in the arm of life. Birds were singing their different songs in the air, in the trees, and in the fields. As we came to Amiou path and turned northwest to face Grandmother Mountain, the southeast mountains let go the sun's edge, white. Now I walk that way in that light.

My grandmother Valant felt well and walked easily that morning, and she said, "Let's go and see our family in Madidinou." So we went that way, towards the sun, and came there along Sinshan Creek, where the wild and domestic geese and ducks were feeding and talking in great numbers in the cattail marshes. I had been to Madidinou many times, of course, but this time the town looked altogether different, since I was on

a journey beyond it. I felt serious and important, and did not want to play with my Red Adobe cousins, though they were the children I loved best. My grandmother visited awhile with her daughter-in-law—her son died before my birth—and her grandchildren's stepfather, and then we went on our way, crossing the plum and apricot orchards to the Old Straight Road.

I had been past and across the Old Straight Road with my Madidinou cousins, but now I was going to walk on it. I felt important but awed, and whispered heya for the first nine steps. People said it was the oldest work of hands in all the Valley, that nobody knew how long there had been a road there. Parts of it were indeed straight, but other parts went curving off towards the River and then came back to the straight. In the dust were marks of feet, sheep's hooves, donkeys' hooves, dogs' paws, people's feet shod, people's feet bare, so many tracks of feet that I thought they must be all the tracks of all the people that had ever walked on the road for fifty thousand years. Great Valley oaks stood along the sides of the road to give windbreak and shade, and in places elms, or poplars, or huge white eucalyptus so vast and twisted that they looked older than the Road; but it was so wide that even the morning shadows did not reach across it. I thought that because it was so old, it had to be wide; but my mother explained that it was wide because the big flocks of the Upper Valley went along it to the saltgrass prairies at the Mouths of the Na after the World, and came back up-valley after the Grass, and some of those flocks were of a thousand sheep or more. They had all gone by, and we met only a couple of dungcarts following after the last of them, with a group of shifty and raucous adolescents from Telina shovelling up dung for the fields. They called all sorts of jokes at us, and



Himpi





"Two quail run,
Two quail rise . . ."

my mothers replied laughing, but I hid my face. There were some other travellers on the road, and when they greeted us, again I hid my face each time; but once they were past I stared after them and asked so many questions, who are they? where are they coming from? where are they going?, that Valiant began to laugh at me and answer me with jokes. Because she was lame we went slowly, and because it was all new to me the way seemed immensely long to me, but by midmorning we came through the vineyards to Telina-na. I saw that town rise beside the Na, the great barns, the walls and windows of its houses among the oaks, the roofs of the heyimas, high-stepped, red and yellow around the bannered dancing place, a town like a bunch of grapes, like a cock pheasant, rich, elaborate, amazing, beautiful.

My grandmother's half-sister's son was living in Telina-na in a Red Adobe household, and that family had sent word to us to stay with them on our way. Telina was so much bigger than Sinshan that I thought there was no end to it, and that household was so much bigger than ours that I thought there was no end to them. Actually there were only seven or eight, living in the ground floor of Hardcinder House, but other relatives and friends kept coming and going, and there was so much working and talking and cooking and bringing and taking that I thought this household must be the wealthiest in the world. They heard me whisper to my grandmother, "Look! There are seven cooking-pots!" They all laughed at that. I was ashamed at first, but they kept repeating what I had said and laughing with so much good nature that I began saying things to make them laugh more. After I said, "This household is huge, like a mountain!" my half-uncle's wife Vine said, "Come and live with us awhile in this mountain, then, you North Owl. We have seven pots but no daughter. We need one!" She meant that; she was the center of all that giving and taking and flowing, a generous person. But my mother did not let the words come to her, and my grandmother smiled but said nothing.

That evening my Red Adobe cousins, Vine's two sons and some other children of the household, took me all around Telina. Hardcinder House is one of the inner houses of the left-hand common place. In the center place a horse race was going on, a wonder to me who had never dreamed of a common place big enough to hold a horse race on. I had not seen many horses, for that matter, in Sinshan it was donkey races in a cow pasture. The course was around the place leftwards, reverse, and back around rightwards to make the hey'ai-i. People were up in the balconies and out on the roofs with oil and battery lamps, betting and drinking and shouting, and the horses ran through shadow and flashing lights, turning as fast as swallows, the riders yipping and yelling. Over in some balconies of the right-hand place people were singing, getting ready for the Summer dancing.

Over in the dancing place they were singing down in the Serpentine heyimas, too, but we only went by there on the way to the River. Down among the willows there where the lights from the town made a little gleaming among the shadows, couples had come away to enjoy privacy. We children sneaked around looking for them in the willow thickets, and when we found a couple my cousins would yell, "Holy mole, there's sand in the hole!" or make rude noises, and the couple would get up swearing and come after us, and we would scatter and run. If those cousins of mine did that every warm night, there wasn't much need for contraceptives in Telina. When we got tired we went back to the house and ate some cold beans and went to sleep on the balconies and porches. All night we heard them singing the Quail Song over the way.

Next morning we three left early, though not before daybreak and a good breakfast. As we crossed the Na on the arched stone bridge, my mother held my hand. She did not do that often. I thought she did it because it was sacred to cross the River. I think now she was afraid to lose me. She thought she should let me stay in the rich town with those rich relatives.

When we were away from Telina-na her mother said to her, "For the winter, perhaps, Willow?"

My mother said nothing.

I did not think anything about it. I was happy, and talked the whole way to Chumo about the wonderful things I had seen and heard and done in Telina-na. All the time I talked my mother held my hand.

We came into Chumo hardly knowing we had come into it, the houses are so scattered out and hidden among trees. We were to spend the night at our heyimas there, but first we went to visit my grandmother's husband, my mother's father. He had a room of his own with some of his Yellow Adobe relatives in a single-story house under oaks in sight of the creek, a pretty place. His room, which was his workroom, was large and dank. Up till then I had always known my grandfather by his middle name, Potter, but he had changed his name: he told us to call him Corruption.

I thought that was a crazy name, and being puffed up by the laughter of the family in Telina when I made jokes, I said to my mother, pretty loudly, "Does he stink?" My grandmother heard and said, "Be quiet. It's nothing to joke about." I felt bad and foolish, but my grandmother didn't seem to be cross with me. When the other people of the house had gone back to their rooms, leaving us with my grandfather in his room, she said to him, "What kind of name have you let come to you?"

He said, "A true name."

He looked different from the way he had looked the summer before in Sinshan. He had always been gloomy and complaining. Nothing was ever right, and nobody ever did things right except himself, although he never did anything much, because the time wasn't right. Now he still looked grim and sour, but he behaved with importance. He said to Valiant, "There's no use going to the hot springs for a cure. You'd do better staying home and learning how to think."

"How do you learn that?" she asked.

He said, "You have to learn that your pains and aches are merely an error in thinking. Your body is not real."

"I think it's real," Valiant said, and she laughed and slapped her hips.

"Like this?" Corruption said. He was holding the wooden paddle he used to smooth the outside of the big clay storage jars he made. The paddle was carved of olive wood, as long as my arm and a handspan wide. He held it up in his right hand, brought his left hand up towards it, and passed it through his left hand. It went through muscle and bone like a knife through water.

Valiant and Willow stared at the paddle and the hand. He motioned to them to let him do the same thing to them. They did not put up their hands; but I was curious, and wanted to go on having attention paid to me, so I held up my right arm. Corruption reached out the paddle and passed it through my arm between wrist and elbow. I felt the soft motion of it; it felt as a candle flame feels when you pass a finger through it. It made me laugh with surprise. My grandfather looked at me and said, "This North Owl might come to the Warriors."

It was the first time I had heard that word.

Valiant said, and I could tell she was angry, "No chance of that. Your Warriors are all men."

"She can marry one," said my grandfather. "When the time comes she can marry Dead Sheep's son."

"You can go do such-and-such with your dead sheep!" Valiant said, which made me laugh again, but Willow touched her arm to quieten her. I don't know whether my mother was frightened by the power her father had shown, or by the quarrelling between her father and mother; anyhow, she restored quiet behavior between them. We drank a glass of wine with my grandfather, and then we walked with him to the dancing place of Chumo and to the Blue Clay heyjamas. We spent the night there in their guest room, the first night I had slept underground. I liked the silence and stillness of the air, but was not used to it, and kept waking in the night and listening, and only when I heard my mother's breathing could I sleep again.

There were some other people Valiant wanted to see in Chumo, where she had lived when she learned tapestry weaving, and we did not leave that town till near noon. As we went along the northeast side of the River the Valley narrowed in, and the road went among orchards of olive, plum, and nectarine, among hills terraced with vines. I had never been so close to the Mountain, and it filled my eyes. When I looked back, I could not see Sinshan Mountain: its shape had changed, or other mountains of the southwest side had hidden it. That alarmed me. I finally spoke of it to my mother, who understood my fear, and reassured me that when we returned to Sinshan our mountain would be where it belonged.

After we crossed the Wether Creek we could see the town of Chukulmas up in the hills across the Valley, its Fire Tower standing up by itself, built of colored stones, red, orange, and yellowish-white, patterned as finely as a basket or a snake. Cattle grazed in the yellow pasture-bays on the foothills, between the arms of the woods. On the narrow, flat floor of the Valley were many wineries and fruit-drying sheds, and the orchards from Chukulmas were putting up summerhouses. Beside the Na the dark mills loomed among the oaks, their wheels making a sound you could hear for a long way. Quail were calling the three-note call and larks went up from the fields and the buzzards turned very high up. The sunlight was clear, the air was still.

My mother said, "This is a day of the Ninth House."

My grandmother said only, "I'll be glad to get to Kastoha." Since we left Chumo she had been silent and walked lame.

There was a feather on the way before my mother's feet, a grey-banded, blue wing-feather of a jay. It was the answer to what she had said. She picked it up and held it as she walked. She was a small woman, round-faced, with fine hands and feet, barefoot that day, wearing old buckskin trousers and a sleeveless shirt, carrying a little backpack, her hair braided and coiled, a blue feather in her hand. So she walks in the sunlight in the still air.

Shadows were coming across the Valley from the western hills when we came to Kastoha-na. Valiant saw the roofs above the orchards and said, "Aha, there's Granny's Twat!" Old people used to call Kastoha that, because it is between the spread legs of the Mountain. Hearing it called that, I had imagined the town to be set among fir and redwood trees and to be a cave, dark and mysterious, with the River running out of it. When we came across the Na Bridge and I saw it was a big town like Telina only bigger yet, with hundreds of houses, and more people than I knew were in the world, I began crying. Maybe it was shame that made me cry, because I saw how silly I had been to think that a town could be a cave; maybe I was frightened or tired from all I had seen in the

days and nights of our journey. Valiant took my right arm in her hands and felt it and looked at it. She had not done that after Corruption had put the paddle through it; nothing at all had been said about that. "He's an old fool," she said now, "and so am I." She took off the silver crescent bracelet which she always wore, and slipped it over my hand onto my right arm. "There," she said. "It won't fall off, North Owl."

She was so thin that the crescent was only a little large for my small arm; but that was not what she meant. I stopped crying. In the lodging house by the hot springs that night I slept, but while I slept I knew all night that the moon was on my arm, under my head.

On the next day I saw the Condor for the first time. Everything in Kastoha-na was strange to me, everything was new, everything was different from home, but as soon as I saw those men I knew that Shishan and Kastoha were all one thing, the same thing, and this was a different thing.

I was like a cat that scents a rattlesnake or a dog that sees a ghost. My legs got stiff, and I could feel the air on my head because my hair was trying to stand up. I stopped short and said in a whisper, "What are they?"

My grandmother said, "Men of the Condor. Men of no House."

My mother was beside me. She went forward very suddenly and spoke to the four tall men. They turned to her, beaked and winged, looking down at her. My legs went weak then and I wanted to piss. I saw black vultures stooping on my mother, stretching out their red necks, their pointed beaks, starting with eyes tinged with white. They pulled things out of her mouth and belly.

She came back to us and we walked on towards the hot springs. She said, "He's been in the north, in the volcano country. Those men say the Condor are coming back. They knew his name when I said it, they said he is an important person. Did you see how they listened when I said his name?" My mother laughed. I had never heard her laugh that way.

Valiant said, "Whose name?"

Willow said, "My husband's name."

They had stopped again, facing each other.

My grandmother shrugged and turned away.

"I tell you he's coming back," my mother said.

I saw white sparkles crowding all around her face, like flies of light. I cried out, and then I began to vomit, and crouched down. "I don't want it to eat you!" I kept saying.

My mother carried me back to the lodging house in her arms. I slept awhile, and in the afternoon I went with Valiant to the hot springs. We lay a long time in the hot water. It was brownish-blue and full of mud and smelled of sulphur, very disagreeable at first, but once you were in

it you began to feel like floating in it forever. The pool was shallow, wide, and long, lined with blue-green glazed tiles. There were no walls, but a high roof of timbers; screens could be set against the wind. It was a lovely place. All the people there had come there for healing, and talked only quietly, or lay alone in the water singing soft healing songs. The blue-brown water hid their bodies, so looking down the long pool you could only see heads resting on the water, leaning back against the tiles, some with eyes closed, some singing, in the mist that hung above the hot springs.

I lie there, I lie there,

I lie where I lay

Floating in the shallow water.

It floats there, it floats there,

The mist above the water.

The lodging house of the hot springs of Kastoha-na was our household for a month. Valiant bathed in the waters and went daily to the Doctors Lodge to learn the Copper Snake. My mother went alone up onto the Mountain, to the Springs of the River, to Wakwaha, and on to the summit in the tracks of the mountain lion. A child could not spend all day in the hot pool and the Doctors Lodge, but I was afraid of the crowded common places of the big town, and we had no relatives in the houses, so I stayed mostly at the hot springs and helped with the work. When I learned where the Geyser was I went there often. An old man who lived there and guided visitors about the heya place and sang the story of the Rivers Underground used to talk to me and let me help him. He taught me a Mud Wakwa, the first song I received for myself. Not many people even then knew that song, which must be very old. It is in an old form, sung alone with a two-note wooden drum, and most of the words are matrix, so it is no good for writing. The old man said, "Maybe the people of the Sky Houses sing this one when they come to bathe at the mud-baths here." Inside the matrix at one place in the song the other words come out and say:

From the edges inward to the middle,

Downward, upward to the middle,

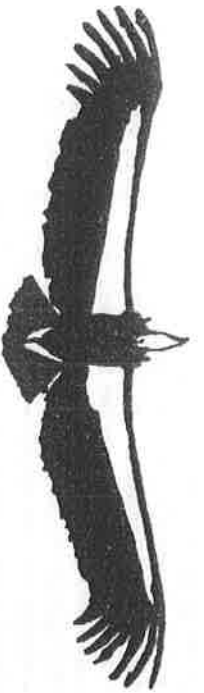
All these have come in here,

They are all coming in here.

I think the old man was right, and it is an Earth song. It was my first gift and I have given it to many.

Keeping out of the town, I saw no more men of the Condor, and I





forgot them. After a month we went home to Sinshan in time to dance the Summer dances, Valiant was feeling well, and we walked down the Valley to Telina-na in one morning and then on to Sinshan in the evening. When we got to the bridge across Sinshan Creek I was seeing everything backwards. The hills in the north were where the houses on the left should be, the houses on the right hand were where the houses on the left should be. Even inside our house it was like that. I went around all the places I knew finding everything turned around. It was strange, but I enjoyed the strangeness, though I hoped it would not remain. In the morning when I woke up with Sidi purring in my ear, everything was where it belonged, north in the north and left to the left, and I have never seen the world backwards again, or only for a moment.

After the last of the Summer was danced we went up to our summerhouse, and there Valiant said to me, "North Owl, in a few years you will begin to be a woman, bleeding woman's blood, and last year you were only a grasshopper, but here you are now in the middle, a good place, your clearwater years. What do you want to do in this place?"

I thought about it for a day and told her, "I want to go up in the tracks of the lion."

She said, "Good."

My mother did not ask or answer. Since we came back from Kasioha-na she was always as if listening for a word, listening far away, holding still.

So my grandmother made me ready to go. For nine days I ate no meat, and for the last four of the nine I ate only raw food, once a day at midday, and drank water four times a day in four drafts. Then I woke up early, before light, and got up, and took the pouch with gifts in it. Valiant was sleeping but I thought my mother was lying awake. I whispered heyra to them and to the house and went out.

Our summerhouse was in a meadow up in the hills over Hard Canyon Creek, a mile or so upstream from Sinshan. We had gone there for the summers of all my life with a family of Obsidian people of Chinbam House, mingling our sheep; there was good pasture for them up the hills, and the creek ran right through to the rains, most years. The name of

the meadow was Gahheya, for the big blue serpentine heyra rock in the northwest part of it. As I left I went past that rock Gahheya. I was going to stop and speak to it, but it was speaking to me; it said, "Don't stop, go on, go high, before the sun." So I went on up across the high hills, walking while it was still dark, running when it began to be light, and I was on the high ridge of Sinshan Mountain when the earth's curve and the sun's curve parted. I saw light fall on the southeast side of all things, and the darkness turn away across the sea.

After singing heyra there I walked along the ridge of the mountain from northwest to southeast, following deer paths through the chaparral and making my own way where the underbrush was thinner under the fir and pine forests, not going quickly but very slowly, stopping all the time and listening and looking for directions and signs. The whole day long I kept worrying about where I would sleep the night. I crossed and recrossed the ridges of the mountain, always thinking, "I must find a good place, I must come to a good place." No place seemed to be good. I said to myself, "It should be a heyra place. You'll know it when you come to it." But what I was really holding in my mind without thinking about it was the puna and the bear, wild dogs, men from the coast, strangers from the beach country. What I was looking for was a hiding place. So I walked all day long, and every time I stopped anywhere, I was trembling.

Having gone above the springs, I was thirsty when it got dark. I ate four seed-pollen balls from my gift pouch, but after eating I felt thirstier and a little sick. Dusk had come up onto the mountain before I had found the place I couldn't find, so I had stayed where I was, in a hollow under some manzanita trees. The hollow seemed to shelter me, and manzanitas are pure heyra. I sat a long time there. I tried to sing heyra but did not like the sound of my voice alone there. I lay down at last. Whenever I moved at all, the dry manzanita leaves shouted, "Listen! She's moving!" I tried to lie still, but the cold kept making me curl up; it was cold up there, with the wind bringing a sea fog in over the mountain. Fog and night did not allow me to see, though I kept staring into the dark. All I could see was that I had wanted to come up on the mountain and had expected to do everything right, to walk in the tracks of the lion, but instead I had come to nothing and had spent all day running away from lions. That was because I had not come up here to be the lion but to show the children who called me a half-person that I was a better person than they were, that I was a brave and holy eight-year-old. I began to cry. I pushed my face into the dirt among the leaves and cried into the dirt, the mother of my mothers. So with my tears I made a small salt mud place up on that cold mountain. That made me think of the song that had come to me from the old man at the Geysers, the Mud Wakwa, and I sang it in my mind. It helped me some. So the night went



on being. Thirst and cold did not let me sleep and weariness did not let me wake.

As soon as light began to come, I went down from the ridge to find water, going down through thick brush in one of the canyonheads. It was a long way I went before a spring let me find it. I was in a maze of canyons, and got turned around, and when I came up onto the ridges again I was in between Sinshan Mountain and She Watches. I went on up till I came to a big bald foothill, from which I could look back and see Sinshan Mountain facing me from the wrong side, the outside. I was outside the Valley.

I kept going all that day as I had the day before, walking slowly and stopping, but my mind was changed. It was not thinking, yet it was clear. All I said to myself was, "Try to be on a way that goes around this mountain. She Watches without going down or up much, and so come back to this bald place on this hill." There was a good feeling on that hill, where the wild oats were bright pale yellow in the sunlight. I thought I would find it again. So I went on. Everything that came to me I spoke to by name or by saying hey-a, the trees, fir and digger pine and buckeye and redwood and manzanita and madrone and oak, the birds, blue jay and bushit and woodpecker and phoebe and hawk, the leaves of chamise and scrub oak and poison oak and flowering thorn, the grasses, a deer's skull, a rabbit's droppings, the wind blowing from the sea.

Over there on the hunting side there were not many deer willing to come close to a human being. Deer came to my eyes five times, and once the coyote came. To the deer I said, "I give you what blessing I can, Silent One, give me what blessing you can!" The coyote I called Singer. I had seen the coyote skulking at lambing time, and stealing from the summerhouse, and dead, a bit of dirty fur, all my life, but I had not seen her in her House.

She was standing between two digger pines about twenty feet from me, and she walked forward to see me better. She sat down, with her tail around her feet, and gazed. I think she could not figure out what I was. Maybe she had never seen a child. Maybe she was a young coyote and had never seen a human person. I liked the look of her, lean and neat, the color of wild oats in winter, with light eyes. I said, "Singer! I will go your way!" She sat there gazing and seeming to smile, because the coyote's mouth goes in a smile, then she stood up, stretched a little, and was gone—like a shadow. I could not see her go, so I could not go her way. But that night she and her family sang coyote wakwa near me half the night. The fog did not come in that night; the darkness stayed mild and clear, and all the stars revealed themselves. I felt light, lying at the side of a small clearing under old bay laurel trees, looking up at the star patterns; I began to float, to belong to the sky. So Coyote let me come into her House.



The next day I came back to the wild-oats hill that let me see the wrong side of Sinshan Mountain, and there emptied out my pouch and gave the place my gifts. Without crossing the hill to close the circle, I went back down into the canyons between the mountains, intending to go around Sinshan Mountain from the southeast, and so complete the hey-a-if. In the canyons I got lost again. A creek led me on because the going was easy alongside it, and all the sides of its gully were steep and thick with poison oak. I kept going on down it, and I do not know where I came to. The name of those canyons is Old Fox Hollows, but nobody I asked later, hunters and Bay Lodge people, had ever seen the place. I came to on that creek. It was a long, dark pool where the creek seemed to have stopped running. Around the pool grew trees I have not seen anywhere else, with smooth trunks and limbs and triangular, slightly yellow leaves. The water of the pool was speckled and drifted with those leaves. I put my hand into the water and asked it for direction. I felt power in it, and it frightened me. It was dark and still. It was not the water I knew, not the water I wanted. It was heavy, like blood, and black. I did not drink from it. I squatted there in the hot shade under those trees beside the water and looked for a sign or a word, trying to understand. On the water something came towards me: the water-skater. It was a big one, moving quickly on its shining hollows: the water-skater. I said, "I give you what blessing I can, Silent One, give me what blessing you can!" The insect stayed still awhile there between air and water, where they meet, its place of being, and then it slid away into the shadow of the banks of the pool. That was all there. I got up, singing hey-a-if, and found a way up past the poison oak to the top of the gully, and then got through Old Fox Hollows to Back Canyon, and so onto my own mountain in the heat of the late afternoon of midsummer, the crickets yammering like a thousand bells and the blue jays and black-crowned jays shouting and swearing at me all through the woods. That night I slept sound under live oaks on the side of my mountain. The next day, the fourth, I made feather wands with the feathers that had come to me while I walked and sticks of the live oaks, and at a little seeping spring among rocks and roots at a canyonhead I made as much of the Wakwa of the Springs as I knew. After that I started going home. I got to Gahneya about the time the sun set, and came to the three-walled summerhouse. Willow was not there; Valiant was spinning in front of the house, by the hearth. "Well!" she said. "You'd better go have a bath, maybe?"

I knew she was very glad I was safe home, but she was laughing because I had forgotten to wash after making the wakwa, being in a hurry to get home and eat. I was all sweat and mud.

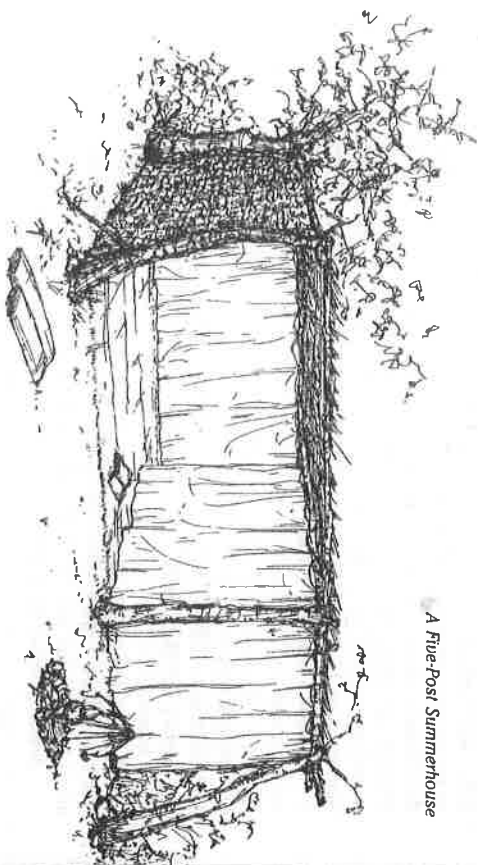
Walking down to Hard Canyon Creek I felt old, as if I had been away longer than four days, longer than the month in Kastoha-na, longer



than the eight years of my life. I washed in the creek, and came back up the meadow in the twilight. Gabheya Rock was there, and I went to it. It said, "Now touch me." So I did, and so came home. I knew something had come to me that I did not understand, and maybe did not want, from that strange place, the pool and the waterskater, but the hinge of my walk had been the golden hill; the coyote had sung to me; and so long as my hand and the rock touched each other I knew that I had not gone wrong, even if I had come to nothing.



Because I had only one grandmother and grandfather in the Valley, a Blue Clay man called Ninepoint had asked to be side-grandfather to me. As I was about to be nine years old, he came over from their summerhouse in Bear Creek Canyon to teach me the songs of the Fathers. Soon after that we went back with him to Sinshan to make ready to dance the Water, while the Obsidian family at Gabheya looked after the sheep. This was the first time I had gone back to town in summer. Hardly anybody was there except Blue Clay people. Singing and doing hey'ya all day long in the town that was empty and open. I began to feel my soul opening out and spreading out with the other souls of the dancers to fill the emptiness. The water poured out from the bowl of blue clay, and the songs were streams and pools in the great heat of summer. The other Houses came in from the summering, and we danced the Water. At



A Five-Post Summerhouse

Tachas Touchas their creek had gone dry, so they came up from there to dance with us, those that had relatives going to them and the others camping in Sinshan Fields or sleeping on balconies. With so many people there, the dancing never stopped, and the Blue Clay hey'ymas was so full of singing and power that touching the roof of it was touching a lion. It was a great wakwa. By the third and fourth days of it people in Madidinou and Telina had heard about the Water in Sinshan and came up to join. On the last night the balconies were full of people, and the hey'ya-if filled the whole dancing place, and in the sky the heat lightning danced in the southeast and the northwest, and you could not tell the drums from the thunder, and we danced the Rain down to the sea and up to the clouds again.

Between the Water and the Wine one day I met my Red Adobe cousins from Madidinou to pick blackberries at Hatchquail Rock. The patches had all been picked over and not many berries were there for us, so Pelican and I were wild dogs and Hops was the hunter, and we hunted each other through those tight thorny paths between the blackberry brambles. I waited till Hops came past my hiding place, and leapt out at him from behind, barking loudly, and knocked him flat. It knocked the wind out of him and he was cross for a while, until I whined and licked his hand. Then we all three sat and talked a long time. He said, "There were some people with bird's heads came through our town yesterday."

I said, "What do you mean, feather gatherers?"

He said, "No, men with heads like birds—buzzards or vultures—black and red."

Pelican began shouting, "He didn't see them, I saw them," but I began to feel scared and sick. I said, "I have to go home now," and went off. My cousins had to run after me with the basket of berries I had picked. They went back to Madidinou and I went through Sinshan Fields across Hechu Creek; I was near the wineries when I looked up and saw a bird in the sky in the southwest, gyring. I thought it was a buzzard, but saw that it was bigger than a buzzard, that it was the great one. Nine times it turned in the air above my town, and then completing the hey'ya-if flew gliding slowly into the northeast, over me. Its wings, each one longer than a person is tall, never moved; only the long feather-fingers of the wing-ends tilted in the wind. When it was gone over Red Cow Hill I went hurrying on to Sinshan. There were a lot of people on the balconies, and in the common place some Obsidian people were drumming up their courage. I went to High Porch House, into our second room, and hid behind the rolled-up beds in the dark corner. I believed I was the one the condor was looking for.

My mother and grandmother came in, not knowing I was there, and talked. "I told you he's coming!" my mother said. "He'll come and find us here!" She spoke angrily and joyfully, as I had never heard her speak.

"May it not happen!" my grandmother said, angry without joy. At that I came out of the dark corner and ran to my grandmother, crying, "Don't let it come! Don't let it come find us!"

My mother said, "Come to me, Condor's Daughter."

I went partway, and stopped. I stood between them, and said, "That is not my name."

My mother was still for two breaths, and then said, "Don't be afraid. You'll see."

She began setting out food to cook supper, as if nothing had happened or was happening. Valiant took her wood drum and went down to our heyimas. People drummed in all the heyimas, that evening.

It was in the last great heat of the year, and people were out on the balconies for the cool after dark. I heard people talking about the condor. Agate, the Librarian of the Madrone, began to say a recital piece called "The Flight of the Great One," which he had made from an old written record by a Finder in the library; it told of the Inland Sea and the Range of Light, the Omorn Sea and the Range of Heaven, the deserts of sage and the prairies of grass, the Mountain of the North and the Mountain of the South, all as the condor would see them flying. Agate's voice was beautiful, and when he read or told one listened and entered into space and quietness. I wished he would speak all night. When the telling was done there was silence for a while; then people began to talk quietly again. Neither Valiant nor Willow was there. People did not notice me, and so they spoke of the Condor as they would not have done in the presence of my family.

Shell was waiting for my grandmother to come back from the heyimas. She said, "If those people are coming back, this time we should not let them stay in the Valley."

"They're in the Valley already," Hound said. "They won't go. They are here to have a war."

"Nonsense," Shell said, "don't talk like a boy, at your age."

Hound, like Agate, was an educated person, who often travelled to Kasloha-na and Wakwaha to read and talk with other scholars. He said, "Blue Clay Woman, the reason I say that is that I have talked with men of the Warrior Lodge in the Upper Valley, and what are warriors but people who make war? And these are our own people, Five-House people of the Valley of the Na, these Warriors. But they have been talking and lending their minds to Condor people, for ten years now, in those towns."

Old Cave Woman, whose last name had come to her when she went blind, said, "Hound, do you mean these Condor people are sick, that they have their heads on crooked?"

He said, "Yes, I mean that."

Somebody farther down the balcony asked, "Are they all men, as people say?"

Hound said, "All that come here are men. Armed."

Shell said, "But listen here, they can't go around smoking tobacco day after day, year after year, that's nonsense! If some men in those big towns up-Valley want to act like boys of fifteen and run around playing war, what's that to us here? All we have to do is just tell the foreigners to keep moving on."

Mouse Dance, who was then speaker of my heyimas, said, "They can do us no harm. We walk the gyre."

Hound said, "And they the wheel, and the power builds!"

"Keep to the gyre," Mouse Dance said. He was a kind, strong man. I wanted to listen to him, not to Hound. I was sitting back against the wall of the house, because I felt like staying under the eaves, out of sight from the sky. Between my feet something was lying on the floor of the balcony, in the starlight it looked like a bit of stick or string. I picked it up. It was dark, stiff, thin, and long. I knew what it was: it was the word I must learn to speak.

I got up and took it to Cave Woman and pushed it into her hand, saying, "Take this, please, it's for you," because I wanted to be rid of it, and Cave Woman was very old, wise, and weak.

She felt it and then held it out towards me. She said, "North Owl, keep it. It was spoken to you." Her eyes looked straight through me in the starlight that was the inside of a cave to her. I had to take the feather back.

She spoke more kindly then. She said, "Don't be afraid. Your hands are a child's hands, they are running water through the wheel. They don't hold, they let go, they make clean." Then she began to rock her body, and closed her blind eyes, and she said, "Heya, Condor's Daughter, in the dry land, think of the creeks running! Heya, Condor's Daughter, in the dark house, think of the blue clay bowl!"

"I am not Condor's Daughter!" I said. The old woman just opened her eyes and laughed and said, "It seems the condor says you are."

I turned to go indoors, upset and ashamed, and Cave Woman said, "Keep the feather, child, till you can give it back."

I went into our rooms and put the black feather into the lidded basket Willow had made for me to keep hehale and remembering things in. Seeing it in the lamplight, dead black, longer than an eagle feather, I began to feel proud that it had come to me. If I had to be different from other people, then let my difference be notable, I thought.

My mother was at the Blood Lodge, my grandmother was at the heyimas. Through the southwest windows I heard the rain-sound of the drums. Through the northeast windows I heard the little owl speak in the



oak trees: u-u-u-u-u-u. I went to sleep alone, thinking of the condor and listening to the owl.



On the first day of the Wine, some Madidinou people came saying that a lot of Condor men were coming down into the Valley over the Mountain from Clear Lake. Ninepoint was going down with his family to pick in the Great Shipa vineyards on the Valley floor, and I went to work with them. While we were picking, people came by saying that the Condor men were coming on the Old Straight Road, and we went there to see them pass. The image in my mind must be a memory, but it is like a wall-painting, bright, crowded, and unmoving: black and red condor-heads in rows, legs and hooves of big horses, gunstocks, wheels. In my mind's image the wheels do not turn.

When we got back to Sinshan the wakwa was beginning, and by sunset the drinking was well along. Yellow Adobe people were laughing and dancing in the common place, and starting to make whip heyya-its, and people of the other Houses were drinking to catch up. Some children joined in the whips, but they soon became more roughhouse than dance, and most of us with first names went up into the balconies to watch the adults get wild. Dada of Old Red House, who was adult but could not think well, came with us. I had never watched the Wine very long before; it had scared and bored me. Now, being nine, I was ready to see it. What I saw was the Reversal. Everybody I knew had become somebody I did not know. The common place was white with moonlight and bonfires and floodlights and crowded with the dancing and the whips and the people clowning. A lot of the adolescents were playing throw-the-pole, and were up and down ladders and stairs and all over the roofs and balconies and in the trees, like shadows, laughing and calling. An Obsidian doctor, Peak, a shy, solemn man, had gone to his heyimas and got one of the big penises that the Blood Clowns use in the Moon dances, and he had strapped it on and was running around poking it at all the women from behind. He shoved it at Cornlassel, and she clapped her legs together on it and jumped forward: the strap broke, Peak fell flat on his face, and she ran off with the big penis yelling, "I got the doctor's medicine!" I saw Agate talking very loud, and dignified Shell dusty and stumbling about after falling off the end of a whip, and my grandmother Valiant dancing with a bottle of wine.

Then the first of the Douniadu ohwe came out of the Yellow Adobe heyimas and across the Hinge, uncoiling and uncoiling as it came till its winged head was three times a person's height and swayed above the lights and fires. Everyone held still as it began to weave the pattern, and then the drums began and the whips went singing after the Douniadu

ohwe as it coiled along the paths from house to house. I had drunk a lot more wine that evening than I had ever drunk before, and now I felt that I had to hold onto the balcony railing to keep from floating off into the air. The Douniadu ohwe came coiling down among the trees from Up the Hill House and closer and closer to High Porch House. Its yellow head paused at our balcony and turned slowly, the eyes looking at each one of us: inside the great eye a small, deep, bright eye. Then it passed on, coiling and swaying in time with the drums. Dada had croched down hiding his face from the Douniadu ohwe. A little boy of our house called Morning Lark was crying with fear, and I was comforting him, when another child said, "Look, who's that?" Some people had come across the bridge and were standing near Gairga oaks. They wore black, and stood there tall and still, like vultures in a tree looking down.

People looked at them and then went on dancing the Wine. The Douniadu ohwe was going back towards the dancing place, and flute players were leading a stampdance in the common place. A Yellow Adobe woman went up to the tall people and spoke to them, waving her arms, and then took them over to the common place, where the wine barrels were set up on sawhorses. Four of them stayed there to drink; but the fifth one came back across the place, past the lights, through the dancing, to High Porch House. Looking down from the balcony I saw my mother Willow coming across from the Hinge, and at the foot of the steps of our household they met.

I ran into our second room. Soon I heard steps come up the stairs and come into our hearthroom. She called me. I went into the hearthroom. He was standing there. His black wings hung down and his red, beaked head touched the ceiling.

My mother said, "North Owl, your father's hungry. Is there anything fit to eat in the house?"

That was what we always said in Sinshan when people came, and they always said, "Only my heart was hungry to see you," and then we brought out food and ate together. But my father did not know what to say. He stood there looking down at me. My mother told me to heat up corn and beans on the stove. While I did that I could look sideways at the man and see that he had a man's face. I had not been sure if the condor's head and beak were his headress or his head. When he took the helmet off, I looked sideways again. He was a beautiful man, with a long nose, wide cheeks, and long, narrow eyes. He was looking at my mother Willow. She was lighting the oil lamp we used at table. So much beauty had come to her that for that moment I did not know I was looking at my mother but saw a stranger, a Four-House person standing there with brightness in her hands.

They talked as well as they could. My father knew only parts and pieces of our language. Not many people from outside the Valley had



come to Sinshan in my lifetime, but I had heard traders from the north coasts and an Amaranth man from the Inland Sea taking as he did—trying to pour water into a broken pot, as the saying is. His groping after the pieces of language he needed was funny, and I saw that he was a human person, however strange he was.

Willow poured wine for the three of us, and we sat down together. My father was so big and long-legged that he made the table far too small and low.

He ate all the corn and beans I had reheated, and said to me, "Very good! Good cook!"

"North Owl is a good cook, and a good herder and reader, and has walked once now on the mountain," my mother said. As she seldom praised me, I felt as if I had just drunk the whole jar of wine. She went on, "If you've had enough to eat for now, husband, come out and drink. We all dance the Wine tonight. And I want everybody in this town to see you!" She laughed as she spoke. He looked at her, perhaps not understanding much of what she said, but with so much liking and admiration that my heart began to warm to him. My mother looked back at him smiling, and said, "While you were gone, a lot of people kept telling me that you were gone. Now that you're here I'd like to tell them that you're here!"

"I'm here," he said.

"Come on, then," she said. "You too, North Owl!"

"What you call baby?" my father asked.

My mother repeated my name.

I said, "I'm not a baby."

"Girl," my mother said.

"Girl," he said, and we all laughed.

"What is owl?" he asked.

I said what the little owl says: u-u-u-u-u-u-u.

"Aha!" he said. "Owl, Come on, Owl." He held out his hand to me. It was the biggest hand I had ever seen or touched. I took it, and we followed my mother down into the dancing.

Willow was full of beauty that night, full of power. She was proud, she was great. She drank, but it was not the wine that made her great; it was the power that for nine years had been pent up in her, and was now set free.

She dances there, she dances there,
She dances where she went
Laughing among the people.
It flashes, it vanishes,
Firelight along the water.



My grandmother got drunk and disorderly, and spent the night in the barns, gambling. When I came up to bed I took my bedding out on the balcony so that my mother and father could have the rooms to themselves. I was happy thinking about that as I went to sleep, and the noise around town did not bother me at all. Other children slept on the balcony or in another household when their parents wanted to be by themselves; and now I was like those children. As a kitten does what all other kittens do, so a child wants to do what other children do, with a wanting that is as powerful as it is mindless. Since we human beings have to learn what we do, we have to start out that way, but human mindfulness begins where that wish to be the same leaves off.

A year before this now where I write this page, after the Madrone Lodge people had asked me to write this story of my life, I went to Giver Ire's daughter, the story writer, and asked if she could teach me how to write a story, for I did not know how to go about it. Among other things Giver suggested to me was that in writing the story I try to be as I was at the time of which I am writing. This has been a good deal easier than I thought it would be, until now, this place now, where my father has come into the house.

It is hard to remember how little I knew. And yet Giver's advice is sound, for now that I know who my father was, why he was there and how he came, who the Condor people were and what they were doing, now that I am learned in such matters, it is my old ignorance, in itself valueless, that is valuable, useful, and powerful. We have to learn what we can, but remain mindful that our knowledge not close the circle, closing out the void, so that we forget that what we do not know remains boundless, without limit or bottom, and that what we know may have to share the quality of being known with what denies it. What is seen with one eye has no depth.

The sorrow of my parents' life is that they could see with one eye only.

All that grieved me—that I was half one thing and half another and nothing wholly—was the sorrow of my childhood, but the strength and use of my life after I grew up.

With one eye I see Willow, Valiant's daughter, of the Blue Clay of Sinshan, who had married a Houseless man, and had a daughter and eight sheep in the family and the use of several gathering trees and a seedgrass place. With the man's hands to work they could do more gardening, and make more, and so perhaps do more giving than taking of things and food, which is a great pleasure, and live respected, without any shame.

With the other eye I see Terter Abhao, True Condor, Commander of the Army of the South, who was off duty with his troops for the autumn



and winter, awaiting orders for the spring campaign. He had brought his three hundred back to the Valley of the Na because he knew the people there were rich and tractable, and would house and feed his men well; and also because he had had a girl in one of the towns there, nine years ago, when he was a fifty-commander, on the first exploration of the South, and he had not forgotten her. Nine years is a long time, and no doubt she had married some farmer of her tribe and had a litter of brats, but even so, he would come by the village and see her.

So he came, and found his hearthfire lighted, his dinner ready, his wife and daughter welcoming him home.

That was what he did not know that he did not know.

From that first night of the Wine he lived in our household. Most people in town had no ill will towards him, since he was Willow's husband and had finally come back, but none of the Houses of Earth took him in. Even in Sinshan there lived one person born outside the Valley: Walker of Blue Walls House had come from the north coasts with traders thirty years before, and had stayed in the Valley, and married Toyon of the Yellow Adobe; and the Serpentine heyimas had taken him in. In the big towns, of course, there are many such people, and in Tachas Touchas they say that all of them came from somewhere in the north, houseless people, how many hundreds of years ago. I do not know why none of the Houses took my father, but I guess that their councils saw that it would not do. He would have had to study, to learn what every child in the heyimas knew already, and he would not have borne it, since he believed he knew all he needed to know. A door seldom opens itself to the man who shuts it. Maybe he did not even know there was a door. He was busy.

Through the councils of the Houses and the Planting Lodges of the four towns of the Lower Valley he made arrangements for his three hundred. They were given Eucalyptus Pastures to use for their camp and horse-grazing, down on the northeast side of the River below Cunnamin. The four towns agreed to give them some corn, potatoes, and beans, and let them hunt from the Hummocks down the inner northeast hills to the Saltmarshes, fish the River below the confluence of Kimi Creek, and take shellfish anywhere east of the East Mouth of the Na. It was a good deal to give, but, as people said, the only wealth is spending; and though three hundred men would eat a lot, it was understood that they would leave the Valley after the Sun, before the World.

That my father would go with them never entered my head. He was home, he was here, our family was whole; now everything was as it should be, balanced, complete; and so it would not change.

Besides, he was entirely different from the men in the camp. He spoke Keshi, and lived in a household, and was a daughter's father.

When he first took me down to Eucalyptus Pastures with him, I was not sure that the men there were human beings. They all dressed alike and looked alike, like a herd of some kind of animal, and they did not speak any word I knew. Whenever they came near my father they would slap their forehead, or sometimes kneel down in front of him as if they were looking at his toes. I thought they were crazy men, very stupid, and that my father was the only real person among them.

Among the people of Sinshan it was sometimes he who seemed rather stupid, though I did not like to admit it. He did not know how to read and write, or cook, or dance, and if he knew songs they were in words no one understood; he did not work in any of the workshops or at the winery or at the barns, and never even walked through the fields; and though he wanted to go out with hunting parties, only the most careless hunters would let him come, because he did not sing to the deer or speak to the death. At first they put it down to ignorance and did it for him, but when he did not learn appropriate behavior, they would not hunt with him. Only once was he notably useful, when the Red Adobe heyimas had to be re-dug and rebuilt. Their speaker was very strict and did not like people from the other Houses helping out, but since my father was a no-House man there were no restrictions on his lending a hand, and his hand was a strong one. But he did not get much goodwill out of that work, because when people saw how he could work they were more inclined to ask why he did so little.

My grandmother held her tongue, but she could not hide her contempt for a man who would not herd or farm or even chop wood. He, holding herders and farmers and woodcutters in contempt, found this hard to bear. One day he said to Willow, "Your mother has rheumatism. She shouldn't work down there in that mud in the rain, digging potatoes. Let her stay home and weave in the warmth. I'll pay some young man to work your patch of land for you."

My mother laughed. I did too; it was a funny idea, a reversal.

"You use money like this, I've seen it here," he said, showing a handful of rather poor money of different kinds from both coasts.

"Well, of course we use money. To give people who act and dance and recite and make, for making, for the dances, you know! What ever did you do to get paid that for?" my mother asked, laughing again.

He did not know what to say.

"Money's a sign, an honor, it shows that you're rich," she tried to explain, but he did not understand, so she said, "Anyhow, about the garden, our plot is much too small to be worth anyone's sharing the work with us. I'd be ashamed to ask."

"I'll bring one of my men, then," he said.

"To work our plot?" my mother said. "But it's Blue Clay land."

My father swore. He had picked up swearing before anything else, and swore well. "Blue clay, red clay, what does it matter!" he said. "Any fool can dig black mud!"

My mother sat spinning awhile and said at last, "That's crazy talk." She laughed again. "If any fool can, why can't you, my dear?"

My father said stiffly, "I am not a *gyon*."

"What's that?"

"A man who digs dirt."

"A farmer?"

"I'm not a farmer, Willow. I am a commander of three hundred, in charge of an army. I am—There are things a man can do and cannot do. Surely you understand that!"

"Surely," my mother said, looking at him with admiration of his dignity. So it all passed without either understanding what the other said and yet without anger or hurt, since their love and liking kept the harm from building up, kept washing it away, like the water in the millwheel.

When they were building the bridge across the Na, my father took me down to Eucalyptus Pastures every day. His dun gelding was twice the weight and half again the height of most Valley horses. Sitting up on that horse, on the high-horned saddle, in front of the big man with the condor helmet, I felt as if I were not a child but something quite different, something rarer than a human being. I would see and hear him speak to the men in the Condor camp; everything he said to them was an order—a direction that had to be obeyed without question or discussion. They never discussed anything. He would give an order, and the man he spoke to would slap his hand over his eyes and run to do whatever it was. I liked seeing that. I was still afraid of the Condor men. All men, all tall, wearing strange clothing, smelling strange, armed, not speaking my language: when they smiled at me or spoke to me I always shrank away and looked down, not answering.

One day when they were starting work on the bridge, my father taught me a word in his language, *pyez*, now: when he signalled I was to shout "*Pyez*!" as loud as I could, and the men working would drop the piledriver, a big stone in a pulley. I heard my high, thin voice and saw ten strong men obey it, over and over. So I first felt the great energy of the power that originates in imbalance, whether the imbalance of a weighted pulley or a society. Being the driver not the pile, I thought it was fine.

There was trouble, however, about the bridge. Ever since the Condor soldiers had camped in Eucalyptus Pastures, groups of men from the Upper Valley towns kept coming down and walking past the camp, or staying in the hills above Ounmain Vineyards, not hunting, just hanging around. These were all members of the Warrior Lodge. People in Sinshan talked about them uneasily, with a kind of fascination—how the Warriors



smoked tobacco daily, how each of them had a gun of his own, and so on. My cousin Hops, who had become a member of the Bay Laurel, would not allow Pelican and me to be wild dogs when we played; we were to be Condors and he a Warrior. But I said Pelican could not be a Condor, since she was not a Condor, and I was—partly. She said she didn't want to be either one and it was a stupid game, and went home. Hops and I hunted each other all over Adobe Hill all afternoon, with sticks for guns, shouting, "*Kak! You're dead!*" when we saw each other. It was the same game the men down around Eucalyptus Pastures wanted to play. Hops and I were mad for it, and played it every day, drawing other children into it, until Valiant noticed what we were doing. She was very angry. She said nothing at all about the game, but put me to work shelling walnuts and almonds till my hands almost dropped off, and told me that if I missed lessons at the heyimas once more before the Grass I would probably grow up to be a superstitious, ill-natured, mindless, repulsive, cowardly person; but of course if that's what I wanted to be it was up to me. I knew that she disapproved of the game, so I stopped playing it; it did not occur to me then that she also wished I would not go down to Eucalyptus Pastures with my father to see them building the bridge.

The next time I went with him, the soldiers were not working: a group of Warriors from Chumo and Kastohana had set up camp right between the pilings on the river shore. Some of the Condor men were angry, I could tell, as they talked to my father; they were asking him to let them make the Valley men move out of the way by force. He said no, and went down to talk to the Warriors. I started to follow him. He sent me back to wait with his horse, so I do not know what the Warriors said to him, but he came back up into the Pastures looking fierce, and talked a long time to his officers.

The Warriors moved away that night, and work went on for a couple of days on the bridge, peacefully, so my father was willing to take me with him to the Pastures when I asked. But when we got there that afternoon, there was a group of Valley people waiting under the last of the great double row of blue-gums that gave the place its name. Some of them came by and began to discuss things with my father. They said they were sorry that some young men had been rude or quarrelsome, and that they hoped it would not happen again; but on consideration, most of the Valley people who had given thought to the matter had decided that it was a mistake to put a bridge across the River without consulting either the River or the people who lived alongside it.

My father said his men needed the bridge to get their supplies across the River.

"There are bridges at Madidinou and Ounmain and ferries at Bluerock and Round Oak," a Valley person said.

"They will not carry our wagons."

"There are stone bridges at Telina and Kastoha."

"That is too far to go round."

"Your people can carry things across by the ferry," said Sun Weaver of Kastoha-na.

"Soldiers don't carry loads on their backs," my father said.

Sun Weaver thought this over a little while and then said, "Well, if they want to eat the food, maybe they'll learn how to carry it."

"My soldiers are resting here. Wagons are for carrying. If our wagons cannot cross the River your people will have to bring the food to us."

"In a pig's eye," said a man from Tachas Touchas.

Sun Weaver and others eyed him. There was a silence.

"We have built bridges in many places. Men of the Condor are not only brave fighters but great engineers. The roads and bridges in the lands around the City of the Condor are the wonder of the age."

"If a bridge at this place were appropriate, there would be one,"

said White Peach from Ounnalain. My father did not like to talk to women in front of Condor men, so he said nothing, and there was another thoughtful silence.

"In our judgment," Sun Weaver said very politely, "this bridge would not be in the right place."

"All you have going south is your railway, with six wooden cars!" my father said. "A bridge here will open up a way clear to—" He paused.

Sun Weaver nodded.

My father thought hard, and said, "Listen. My army is not here to do any harm to the Valley. We are not making war on you." As he spoke



he looked over at me once or twice, seeing me with half his mind, as he worked to find the words he needed. "But you must understand that the Condor rules all the North, and that you live now under the shadow of His wing. I do not bring you war. I only come to widen your roads and build you one bridge that something wider than a fat woman can get across! You see, I build it down here away from your towns, where it need not bother you. But you must not stand in our way. You must come with us."

"We're dwellers, not travellers," said Digger of Telina-na, the speaker of the Blue Clay, a well-known man, quiet, but one of the great speakers. "One doesn't need roads and bridges to go from room to room of one's house. This Valley is our house, where we live. In it we welcome guests whose house is elsewhere, on their way."

My father arranged his reply for a while in his mind, and then said in a strong voice, "My desire is to be your guest. You know that this Valley is my house, too! But I serve the Condor. He has given his orders. The decision is neither mine nor yours to make or change. You must understand that."

At that, the man from Tachas Touchas twisted his head round on his neck with a grin, and he stood back from the group, to signify that he did not consider it profitable to go on talking. A couple of the others did the same; but Obsidian of Ounnalain stood forward to speak. She was the only person in the nine towns at that time called by the name of her House, the best-known of all dancers of the Moon and Blood, unmarried, singlesexed, a person of great power. She said, "Listen, child, I think you don't know what you're talking about. Maybe you could begin to learn, if you learned to read."

He could not take that, in front of his men. Though most of them did not understand her words they heard the scorn and the authority in her voice. He said, "Be quiet, woman!" And looking past her to Sun Weaver, he said, "I will order work on the bridge stopped at this time, because I wish no harm. We will make a plank bridge for the wagons, and take it down when we go. But we will return. It may be that a great army, a thousand men, will come through the Valley. Roads will be widened, bridges will be built. Do not provoke the anger of the Condor! Let them—let them flow through the Valley, as the water through the wheel of the mill."

My father's head was not on backwards. Even in these few months he had begun to understand the image of the water. If only he had been born in the Valley, if only he had stayed and lived in the Valley! But that, as they say, is water under the bridge.

Obsidian walked away in anger, and all the people from Ounnalain followed her except White Peach, who with considerable courage stood



fast and spoke: "Then I think the people of the towns should help these people carry the food we give them; conditions upon gifts are odious."

"I agree," said Digger, and several others from Madidinou, and one from Tachas Touchas. Digger added, from the Water Songs, "The bridge falls, the river runs..." He opened his palms to my father, smiling, and stood back. The others with him did the same.

"That is good," my father said, and he also turned away.

I stood there and did not know which way to turn, whether to go with my father or my townspeople; for I knew that despite their restraint there was anger on both sides, that they had not come together. The weak follow weakness, and I was a child; I followed my father, but I shut my eyes so that nobody would see me.

The business of the bridge was patched up. The soldiers made a plank bridge that would carry their wagons, and the Valley people brought supplies a few sacks or baskets at a time, and left the stuff in a drying shed at Aisamey, where the Condor wagons could come pick it up. But the Warriors kept hanging around keeping watch on the Condor camp; and many people in Oummain refused to give anything to the Condor men, or speak to them, or look at them, and started attending meetings of the Warrior Lodge. Obsidian of the Obsidian of Oummain was one to hold a grudge.

In Tachas Touchas, an Obsidian girl had made friends with one of the Condor men, and wanted to come inland with him; but being only seventeen and frightened by some things people had said to her, she asked for the consent of her heyimas—which my mother Willow had not done in her day. The Obsidian of Tachas Touchas sent people over to Oummain to talk about it, and Obsidian of the Obsidian said, "Why are these Condor people all men? Where are the Condor women? Are they ginkgos? Let them marry each other and breed whatever they like. Let this daughter of our House not take a man of no House!"

I heard about that, but whether the girl in Tachas Touchas took this advice or went on meeting that young Condor, I do not know. Certainly she did not marry him.

Between the Grass and the Sun, the Warriors from up and down the Valley held several wakwa along the Old Straight Road and on the riverbanks, which they called Purifications. Men had joined the Warrior Lodge in all the towns, as the Condor stayed on in the Valley. My side-grandfather Ninepoint's son and grandson joined them, and that whole family was busy for a while weaving them the special clothing they wore for their wakwa, a tunic and hooded cloak in dark wool, something like the Condor soldiers' clothing. The Warrior Lodge had no clowns. When some Blood Clowns from Madidinou came to one of their Purifications, instead of flying with them or ignoring them the Warriors began pushing and pulling them, and there was some fighting and a lot of bad feeling.

There was always sexual trouble and tension around the Warriors. And some women in Sinshan whose husbands had joined that lodge complained about their rules of sexual abstinence, but other women laughed at them; in winter there are so many ritual abstinences for anybody dancing the Sun or the World that another set of them really would not make a great difference, though it might be, as they say, the pin that made the donkey bray.

My grandmother danced the Inner Sun that year, and I fasted the Twenty-One Days for the first time, and listened every night to the trance singing in our heyimas. It was a strange Sun. Every morning of that winter there was fog, and on many days it never lifted up higher than the foothills of Sinshan Mountain, so that we lived under a low roof; and in the evening the fog would settle back down to the Valley floor. There were more White Clowns than ever before, that year. Even if some of them came to Sinshan from other towns, still there were too many; some must have come from the Four Houses, from the House of the Lion, through that wet white fog that hid the world. Children were afraid to go out of sight of the houses. Even the balconies were frightening at dusk. Even in the hearthroom a child might look up and see the white staring face at the window, and hear the stuttering.

I had tended my seedlings in a place in the woods over the second ridge north of town, a long way, because I wanted them to be a surprise when I gave them. I had a hard time of it making myself go there alone to look after them during the Twenty-One Days, because I was so frightened of the White Clowns. Whenever the little bushbirds or the squirrels chipped and tsked I froze, thinking it was the stuttering. On the morning of the solstice I went to get my seedlings in a fog so thick I could not see five steps before me. Every tree of the woods was a White Clown waiting and groping for me in silence. It was entirely silent. Nothing spoke. Nothing moved but me, in all those white ridges. I was cold to the bone and cold to the soul; I had come into the Seventh House and did not know how to get out again. But I went on, although the woods were so hidden and changed by the fog that I was not sure where I was at any moment, and I got to my little trees. I sang the Sun heya almost with my mouth closed, because any sound was so awful, and dug up the seedlings and replanted them in the pots I had made for them, shaking all the time, hurrying and clumsy. I probably bent the roots. Then I had to take them back to Sinshan. The strange thing was that when I came among the grapevines on Topknot Hill and knew I was home, I was not altogether glad of it. Part of me wanted to be cold and terrified and lost in the fog, part of me was at home in the Seventh House, not in High Porch House. So I went up our stairs and woke my family to the Sun. To Willow I gave a buckeye seedling, to Valiant a wild rose, and to Killa a seedling of the Valley oak. The oak stands now where





we planted it on the west side of the oak grove Gairga, a spreading, shapely tree, not yet heavily girthed. The buckeye and the rose are gone.

Before the Sun was danced and after it, my father was with us in High Porch House every night and morning. Valiant, who danced both the Sun and the World that year, spent most of her time and all her nights down in the heyimas. Willow did not dance, that year; and KILLS was of course bound neither to fast nor to feast. At that time, knowing nothing about his people, I thought that he had no observances or wakwa at all, and stood in no relation to anything in the world, except the soldiers to whom he gave orders, and my mother and myself. He and Willow kept indoors together whenever they could, that winter. After the Sun the low fogs gave way to rain, and a cold spell with snow up on Sushan Mountain like the flour dust on a miller's hair, and hoarfrost some mornings on the grass. My father had some fine red wool rugs which he carried to furnish his tent on march; he had brought them to us, and our hearthroom was rich with them. I liked to lie on them. They smelled of sweet sage and other smells I had no name for, the smell of the place my father came from far away in the northeast. We had plenty of firewood, applewood, since the town had replanted two of the old orchards. There was great peace by the fireside in those long evenings for them and for me. I think of my mother in her beauty by that fire, on the edge of the years of sorrow. It is like watching a fire burning in the rain.

Condor messengers came down over the Mountain to the Commander of the Army of the Condor.

Kills said that night when supper was done, "We must go before your World Dance, Willow."

"I'm not going anywhere in this weather," said my mother.

"No," he said. "It's better not."

There was a silence. The fire talked.

"What's better not?" my mother asked.

"When we start home—I will come for you then," he said.

She said, "What are you talking about?"

They talked backwards for a while, he speaking about the Condor Army coming back from a war on the Amaranth Coast, she-not acknowledging that she had begun to understand him. At last she said, "Is this true: you're telling me that you are going away from the Valley?"

"Yes," he said. "For a while. Against the Inland Coast people. It is the plan of the Condor."

She said nothing.

He said, "A year—not longer than a year. Unless I am sent for to Sai. At the very most, two years, no longer."

She said nothing.

He said, "If I could take you with me I would, but that would be dangerous and foolish. If I could stay—But I cannot. But you will wait for me here."

She stood up from the hearthseat. The softness of the firelight fell from her and left her dark. She said, "If you won't stay, go."

"Listen, Willow," he said. "Listen to me! Is it unfair to ask you to wait? If I were going on a hunting trip, or a trading trip, would you not wait for me? You Valley people, some of you leave the Valley! And come back—and their wives wait for them—I will come back. I promise you. I am your husband, Willow."

She stood there between fire and shadow for a while before she spoke.

"Once," she said.

He did not understand.

"Once, for nine years," she said. "Not twice. You are my husband; you are not. My house holds you; it does not. Choose."

"I cannot stay," he said.

She said, still speaking softly and clearly, "The choice is yours."

"I am the Commander of the Army of the Condor," he said. "As I give orders, I obey orders. In this matter I have no choice, Willow."

She moved away from the fire then, and came across the room.

"You must understand," he said.

She said, "I understand that you choose not to choose."

"You do not understand. I can only ask you, will you wait for me?" She said nothing.



"I will come back, Willow. My heart is here, with you and the child, always!"

She stood beside the second-room doorway while he spoke. My bed was just inside the doorway, and I could see them both, and feel the pulling two ways in her body.

"You must wait for me," he said.

She said, "You have gone."

She came into the second room and closed the door, which had been open for warmth. She stood there in the dark. I lay still. He said, "Willow, come back!" He came to the door and said her name again, angrily, in great pain. She did not reply. Neither of us moved. There was a long time nothing happened, and then we heard him turn and stride across the hearthroom and go down the stairs.

My mother lay down beside me. She said nothing and lay perfectly still; so did I. I did not want to think about what had been said. I tried to go to sleep, and soon I did.

In the morning when I got up, my mother had rolled up the red rugs and put them with my father's clothes on the balcony by the head of the stairs outside our door.

Towards noon my father came up the stairs and past the rugs and clothes. He came in the door. My mother was inside; she did not look at him or answer when he spoke to her, and when he stood aside from the doorway she left the house at once, going to our heyimas. He went after her. Some Blue Clay people came right out and kept him from going down into the heyimas. At first he acted crazy, but they quietened him, and Ninepoint explained to him that a man may come and go as he likes, and a woman may take him back or not as she likes, but the house is hers, and if she shuts the door he may not open it. People had come to listen because of the noise he had made shouting at first, and some of them thought it was funny to explain such things to a grown man. Strength, a speaker of the Blood Lodge, scoffed at him. When he said, "But she belongs to me—the child belongs to me," she began to do the Blood Clown turkey-gobble around him, shouting, "The hammer menstruates to me! They plead the courage to her!" and a string of reversal-words like that. There were some people in town glad to see the Condor humiliated. I saw this from the balcony of our house.

My father came back up the stairs. He kicked the roll of rugs and clothing in rage, like a child, and stood there in the doorway. I had gone back to the kitchen table, where I had been making cornbread. I kept working there with my back turned. I did not know what to do, how I should act, and I hated my father for causing this uncertainty and misery. I was glad Strength had jeered at him, and wanted to jeer at him too, for being so stupid.

"Owl," he said. "Will you wait for me?"



Not expecting to cry at all, I began crying.

"If I live I will come back to you here," he said. He did not come in and I did not go to him. I turned around and nodded. When I looked up at him he was putting on the Condor helmet that hid his face. He turned and left.

Valiant had been weaving; her loom was set up by the windows in the second room. When my mother came back to the house, Valiant said to her, "Well, he's gone, Willow."

My mother's face was pale and furrowed. She said, "I have gone away from that name. I will go back to my first name."

"Towhee," my grandmother said, in a soft voice, as a mother says a baby's name. She shook her head.

The second part of Stone Telling's story begins on page 173.



NOTES:

p. 8. *I go there . . .*

Except for the preterit "went," the verbs in this verse and others in the same form are in a present tense used in telling myths, recounting dreams, speaking of the dead, and in ceremonial recitations. The English present participle translates this "timeless present" rather well:

Going there, going there.

Going where I went

Crying beside the water.

Going there, going there.

The fog along the water.

p. 10. *So we walked in the arm of life.*

The *Serpentine Codex* may help clarify some of this imagery. In the left arm of the heyya-ii, the symbol of the Whole, the five colors ran black, blue, green, red, yellow, into or out from the center, the right arm of the symbol was white. The left arm was mortality, the right eternity.

p. 17. *the Copper Snake . . . the Mountain Lion . . .*

The Copper Snake may have been a treatment ritual for sufferers of rheumatism. The Mountain—Áma Kulkun, Grandmother Mountain—the Springs of the River Na, and the town at the springs, Wakva-na-na, were the most centrally sacred places to the people of the Valley. To go up on the summits of the mountain "in the tracks of the lion" or "on the hawk's way" was a solitary spiritual excursion undertaken sooner or later, once or more than once, by most of the people of the Nine Towns.

p. 36. *Are they ginkgos?*

The ginkgo tree is sexually dimorphic. Female trees are not usually planted near male trees, lest they be fertilised, since the fruit exudes a terrific stench. In Kesh literature the ginkgo is associated with homosexuality both in satire and in celebration.

p. 38. *"We must go before your World Dance."*

Imperfectly acquainted with the delicacies of Kesh verbal usage, Terter Abhao used the pronoun "we" which includes the person addressed, and a form of the verb "go" which implies going a short distance for a short while; so Willow understood him as saying something like, "You and I might take a walk together some time before the World Dance."

p. 40. . . . *reversal-words like that.* . . .

In Clown improvisus language was deliberately dislocated for subversive effect (as in surrealist poetry and imagery). Abhao inadvertently made just such a dislocation by saying that his wife and child "belonged to" him. Kesh grammar makes no provision for a relation of ownership between living beings. A language in which the verb "to have" is an intransitive and in which "to be rich" is the same word as "to give" is likely to turn its foreign speaker, and translator, into a clown all too often.

The Serpentine Codex

This text, in an archaic calligraphy, is the only verbal element in an accordion-fold book of pictorial symbols in the Library of Wakuhata.



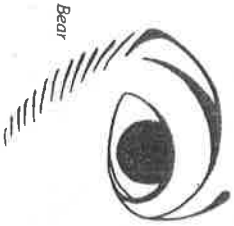
The nine Houses of the living and the dead are the Obsidian, Blue Clay, Serpentine, Yellow Adobe, Red Adobe, Rain, Cloud, Wind, Still Air. The colors of the four Houses of the dead are white and the rainbow. The peoples that live with human people live in the Houses of Earth; the peoples of the wilderness live in the Houses of Sky. Birds are from the Houses of Sky and come from the right hand and may speak for the dead and bear messages to them, and their feathers are the words that the dead spoke. When a child comes from the Four Houses to be born it comes to live in the House of its mother. The Houses of Sky dance the Earth Dance and the Houses of Earth dance the Sky Dance. The House of Blue Clay dances the Water, the House of Yellow Adobe dances the Wine, the House of Serpentine dances the Summer, the House of Red Adobe dances the Grass, the House of Obsidian dances the Moon. All the Houses of Earth and Sky dance the Sun. The Sun with the other stars dances the pattern of Return. The heyiya-ji is the pattern of that pattern and the House of the Nine Houses.

This text provides a compact summary of the structure of society, the year, and the universe, as perceived by the people of the Valley.

The beings or creatures that are said to live in the Five Houses of Earth and are called Earth People include the earth itself, rocks and dirt and geological formations, the moon, all springs, streams, and lakes of fresh water, all human beings currently alive, game animals, domestic

animals, individual animals, domestic and ground-dwelling birds, and all plants that are gathered, planted, or used by human beings.

The people of the Sky, called Four-House People, Sky People, Rainbow People, include the sun and stars, the oceans, wild animals not hunted as game, all animals, plants, and persons considered as the species rather than as an individual, human beings considered as a tribe, people, or species, all people and beings in dreams, visions, and stories, most kinds of birds, the dead, and the unborn.



The chart on pages 46 and 47 shows the Nine Houses, the color and direction associated with each, the annual festival for which each is responsible, and the Lodges, Societies, and Arts associated with each. The chart is schematic and the discussion that follows is simplistic. It may serve as a gloss to certain words, phrases, and unstated assumptions in the Valley texts in this book, and an introduction to their thinking and the themes of their arts. But it is important to know that there is no Valley original for this chart, or anything like it. Although the numbers four, five, and nine, and the representation of the Nine Houses, and their arrangement in the heyia-i or hinged spiral, and the colors, directions, seasons, creatures associated with the Houses are constant motifs of Valley art and thought, and the division between Earth and Sky, mortality and nonmortality, is connected with a fundamental grammatical maneuver of the language (Earth and Sky Modes), still the actual listing and charting of the nine divisions and their various members and functions would strike the Valley mind as somewhat childish and—in fixing and “locking” the information—as risky and inappropriate.

The Five Houses of Earth were the basic divisions of the society, the Kesh equivalent of clan or moiety. Non-Kesh were called no-House people. The Houses were matrilineal and exogamous. All human members of a House were considered first-degree kin, with whom sexual relations were inappropriate (see the section on “Kinfolk,” page 424).

The Houses were not arranged in any hierarchy of power, value, etc., nor was there rivalry among them for status; they were called First, Second, etc., House, but numerical order carried absolutely no implication

of ranking, rating, or importance. Some rivalry did attach to the festivals held annually by each House—not so much among the five Houses, as within them in the nine towns. The word I usually translate as dance—wakwa—may also mean rite, mystery, ceremony, celebration. The annual round of the wakwa constellates the Valley year.

Along in November when the hills begin to turn green the Red Adobe dances the *Gross*. At the winter solstice all nine Houses dance the *Sun*. At the equinox of spring, the Five Houses dance the *Sky* and the Four Houses dance the *Earth*, the whole dance being called the *World*. At the second full moon after this, the Obsidian dances the *Moon*. At the summer solstice and after it, the Serpentine dances the *Summer*. In early or mid-August, the Blue Clay dances the *Water* at springs, pools, and streams. At the autumnal equinox, the Yellow Adobe dances the *Wine*, or *Getting Drunk*.

These seven great wakwa may be found pictorially arranged as the heyia-i, with the *World* in the center (the Hinge), flanked by *Sun* and *Moon* immediately to left and right, *Gross* and *Summer* next outward, and *Wine* and *Water* at the left and right ends of the figure. Such a nonsquential image of the year is characteristic of Valley chronography. And since the two-season climate did not lend itself to dating by season, in conversation events were usually referred to in relation to the wakwa: before the *Gross*, between *Water* and *Wine*, after the *Moon*. (The section “Time and the City” on page 149 pursues Valley ideas of time.)

The material manifestation of each of the Five Houses in each of the nine towns was the heyimas. Finding all such translations as church, temple, shrine, lodge misleading, I use the Kesh word in this book. It is formed of the elements *heyia*, *heyia*—the connotations of which include sacredness, hinge, connection, spiral, center, praise, and change—and *ma*, house.

The heyia-i, two spirals centered upon the same (empty) space, was the material or visual representation of the idea of heyia. Varied and elaborated in countless ways, the heyia-i was a choreographic and gestural element in dance, and the shape of the stage and the movement of the staging in drama were based upon it; it was an organizational device in town planning, in graphic and sculptural forms, in decoration, and in the design of musical instruments; it served as a subject of meditation and as an inexhaustible metaphor. It was the visual form of an idea which pervaded the thought and culture of the Valley.



The direction of movement associated with all Five Houses of the Earth is inward

Those who live in the Five Houses of the Earth are the earth itself, the moon, all rocks and landforms, all fresh waters, individual animals and human beings currently alive, plants used by human beings, domestic and ground-living birds, game and domestic animals.

The Festival

The inhabitants of all Five Houses of the Earth together dance the Sky Dances of the World Ceremony (near the spring equinox) and the Sun Dance (at the winter solstice).

The Moon Dance | The Water Dance | The Summer Dance | The Wine Dance | The Grass Dance

The Lodges

The Bay Laurel Lodge and the Finders Lodge are under the auspices of all Five Houses of the Earth.



The Arts

The Sixth House	The Seventh House	The Eighth House	The Ninth House
RAIN	CLOUD	WIND	STILL AIR
The directions of all Four Houses of the Sky are towards the nadir and towards the zenith. The colors of all Four Houses of the Sky are the spectrum of the rainbow, and white.			
bear death down	puma dream up	coyote wilderness across	hawk eternity out

The directions of all Four Houses of the Sky are towards the nadir and towards the zenith. The colors of all Four Houses of the Sky are the spectrum of the rainbow, and white.

The Inhabitants

Those who live in the Four Houses of the Sky are mast-birds, sea fish, shellfish, wild animals that are not hunted for food (puma, wildcat, feral cat, coyote, wild dog, bear, mink, mouse, vole, rat, woodrat, squirrel, ground squirrel, chipmunk, mole, gopher, skunk, porcupine, otter, fox, badger, reptiles, amphibians, insects; any plant or animal considered as the species or in general); human beings as the species, people, tribe, or nation; the dead, the unborn; all beings in stories or dreams; the oceans, the sun, the stars.

The Festivals

The inhabitants of the Four Houses dance the Earth Dances of the World Ceremony, and the Sun Dance.

The Lodges

The Black Adobe Lodge and the Madrone Lodge are under the auspices of all Four Houses of the Sky.

The Arts

The Milling Art is under the auspices of all Four Houses of the Sky.

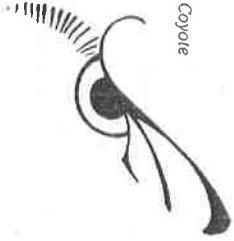
In a Valley town everybody had two houses: the house you lived in, your dwelling-place, in the Left Arm of the double-spiral-shaped town; and in the Right Arm, your House, the heyimas. In the household, you lived with your kintfolk by blood or by marriage; in the heyimas you met with your greater and permanent family. The heyimas was a center of worship, instruction, training, and study, a meetinghouse, a political forum, a workshop, a library, archive, and museum, a clearinghouse, an orphanage, hotel, hospice, refuge, resource center, and the principal center of economic control and management for the community, both internally and in regard to trade with other Kesh towns or outside the Valley.

In the smaller towns the heyimas was a large, five-sided, underground chamber, subdivided with partitions, with a low, four-sided, pyramidal roof showing aboveground. Stairways went up the roof at the corners, and the entrance was by skylight and ladder. In Telina and Kasioha both the underground rooms and the ornamented roofs were very much larger, and in Wakwaha, on the Mountain, the five heyimas were great underground complexes, their splendid roof-pyramids surrounded by secondary buildings and plazas. The public area within the curve of the five heyimas was called the common place, that within the curve of the five heyimas was called the dancing place. The map of the town of Sinshan on page 178 shows how a Kesh town was laid out.

Some further discussion of the affiliation of the Lodges and Arts with the Houses is in the section "Lodges, Societies, Arts," on page 430. As the chart shows, the Millers, whose professions included responsibility for watermills, windmills, and generators, various kinds of engineering, and the construction, operation, and maintenance of machines, held a distinguished yet anomalous position, having no House among the living responsible for them.

Other apparent anomalies are a function of charting and translating. In English one can say that a quail lives in the Second House, but it begins to sound odd to say that a tomato vine lives in the Fifth House, and it is very odd to say that the dead and the unborn live in the Houses of the Sky. The Kesh might say that this is because we do not live in the Houses ourselves, but remain outside.

Coyote



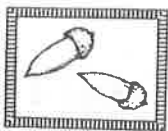
The heyimas buildings are, as you please, the Five Houses, or material manifestations of them, or representations of them. Of the Four Houses, the principal material manifestations are meteorological: rain for the Sixth House, clouds, fog, and mist for the Seventh, wind for the Eighth, and for the Ninth House still air, thin air, which is also called breath. The other great symbols of the Four Houses, Bear, Puma, Coyote, Hawk, may be seen as mythological devices, imaginative configurations, not to be taken literally; yet one cannot discount the literal aspect. To go into Coyote's House is to be changed. Again, the Four Houses are the Houses of Death, Dream, Wilderness, Eternity. All these aspects interconnect, so that rain, the bear, and death may each symbolise either of the others: verbal and iconographic imagery flourish with this interlinking. The whole system is profoundly metaphorical. To limit it to any other mode would be, in the judgment of the people of the Valley, superstition.

It is for this reason that I do not refer to the system of the Nine Houses as a religion or the heyimas as religious houses, despite the obvious and continuous relation of Valley living and thinking with the sacred. They had no god; they had no gods; they had no faith. What they appear to have had is a working metaphor. The idea that comes nearest the center of the vision is the House; the sign is the hinged spiral or heyiya-if; the word is the word of praise and change, the word at the center, hey'al

Hawk



Where It Is



THE MOUNTAINS OF the Valley's parallel framing ranges aren't high; even the Grandmother, Ama Kulkun, the old volcano at which the ranges meet in a tangled knot, isn't much over four thousand feet. The Valley floor is a flat river plain, but the hills come up steep-sided from it and the ranges are rugged, deep-cut with creek canyons. On slopes that face the east and are sheltered from the sea wind, trees and shrubs grow thick: digger pine, fir, redwood, madrone, and manzanita; scrub and live and tan and white and black oak and the great Valley oak; buckeye, bay laurel, willow and ash and alder. Where it's dryer, the chaparral: a low, dense scrub of buckbrush or wild lilac that flowers sweet blue and violet as the rains end, and white-flowering chamise, and chaparral pea, deerwood, toyon, coffeeberry, coyote bush, and always the scrub oak, and always the poison oak. Along the creeks grow sweetshrub and oceanspray and yellow azalea, and the wild rose and the wild vine of California; on the west-facing, windy hillsides and the round hills of serpentine, only the wild grasses and the wild flowers.

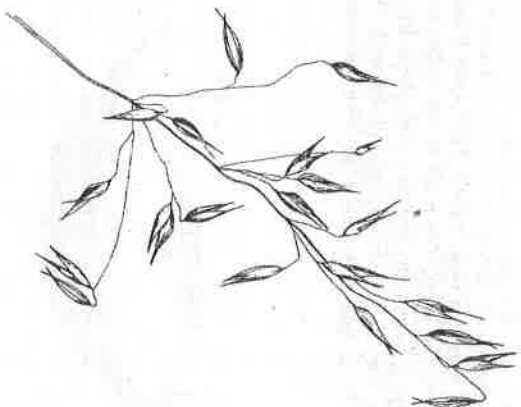
It was always an austere land, generous but not lush, not soft, not gentle. It always had two seasons: one wet, one dry. The rains and the heat can be fierce, frightening. Growing things go through their sweet slow steady order of flowering, ripening, resting as they do anywhere, but the turn from one season to the other is less transition than reversal. A few dark-grey, pouring days when the burnt and sodden brown hills brighten suddenly into the aching, piercing green of the new grass.... A few cloud-flurried, shining days when the orange poppies, the blue lupine, the vetch, clover, wild lilac, brodiaea, blue-eyed grass, daisies, lilies are all in bloom, whole hillsides white and purple and blue and gold, but at the same moment the grass is drying, turning pale, and the wild oats have already sown their seed. Those are the times of change: the greening into winter, the dying into summer.

Where It Is

The fog comes in. It comes up from the vast flat mudlands, the sea marshes and reed beds, the estuaries and endless tules southeastward, the sea beaches over the southwest range. Around Shishan Mountain and She Watches and Spring Mountain, hard, dark, depthless silhouettes on the dry sky, the fog comes moistening and blurring and rubbing things out. The mountains all go quietly away. Under a low roof the hills are dim. Every leaf beads and drips. The little brown birds of the chaparral fit uncertainty and say *isp, ikk*, somewhere nearby but never seen. A Valley oak looms huge, you can't see where its arms are reaching to. If you went up from Wakwaha on such a morning you'd come out of the fog somewhere on the road, come right through that roof, and turning, look back on a white fog-sea breaking in brilliant silence on the hills. It has done that for a long time. They are old hills, but fog is older.

The dirt of the Valley is black or brown adobe clay or the red dirt that blue-green serpentine rock breaks down into, with streaks of volcanic ash; not a rich, openminded, amenable soil, but poor, opinionated, cranky dirt. It spits wheat out. What it has to say to the farmer is grapevine, olive, rose, lemon, plum. Tough stuff, sweet-smelling, strong-tasting, long-lived. And corn, beans, squashes, melons, potatoes, carrots, greens, what have you, whatever you want, if you work hard enough, and dig when it's like wet cement and water when it's like dry cement. A difficult dirt.

In our day the River of the Valley barely trickles through a drought year, when by September all but the biggest creeks are dry; but the Na



will have been a bigger, though a shorter, stream. When the Great Valley as a whole subsides, the rifting along the fault lines and probably some magma pockets under Ama Kuikun will have sent the Valley's elevation up; the waterable under it would also rise; and what with the hot summers of the Great Valley much tempered by the Inland Sea and the vast marshlands, and the sea fogs flowing over the sea currents through a far broader Gate, the climate will have been modified. The dry season not so intensely dry; the creeks fuller; the river stailier, more considerable, more worshipful. But still less than thirty miles from spring to sea.

Thirty miles can be a short or a long way. It depends on the way you go them; what the Kesh called *wakuaha*.

With ceremony, with forms of politeness and reassurance, they borrowed the waters of the River and its little confluent to drink and be clean and irrigate with, using water mindfully, carefully. They lived in a land that answers greed with drought and death. A difficult land: aloof yet sensitive. Like the deer who live there, who will steal your food and be your food, skinny little deer, thief and prey, neighbor and watcher and watched, curious, unfrightened, untrusting, and untamable. Never anything but wild.

The roots and springs of the Valley were always wild. The patterns of the grapestakes and the pruned vines, the rows of grey olive trees and the formal splendor of flowering almond orchards, the sharp-footed sheep and the dark-eyed cattle, the wineries of stone, the old barns, the mills down by the water, the little shady towns, these are beautiful, humane, endearing, but the roots of the Valley are the roots of the digger pine, the scrub oak, the wild grasses careless and uncared for, and the springs of those creeks rise among the rifts of earthquake, among rocks from the floors of seas that were before there were human beings and from the fires inside the earth. The roots of the Valley are in wildness, in dreaming, in dying, in eternity. The deer trails there, the footpaths and the wagon tracks, they pick their way around the roots of things. They don't go straight. It can take a lifetime to go thirty miles, and come back.

Pandora Worries About What She Is Doing: The Pattern

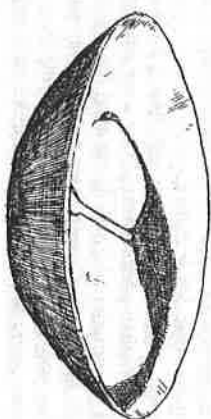
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PANDORA DOESN'T WANT to look into the big end of the telescope and see, jewel-bright, distinct, tiny, and entire, the Valley. She shuts her eyes, she doesn't want to see, she knows what she will see: Everything Under Control. The dolls' house. The dolls' country.

Pandora rushes out of the observatory with her eyes shut, grabbing, grabbing with her hands.

What does she get, besides cut hands? Bits, chunks, fragments. Shards. Pieces of the Valley, lifesize. Not at a distance, but in the hand, to be felt and held and heard. Not intellectual, but mental. Not spiritual, but heavy. A piece of madrone wood, a piece of obsidian. A piece of blue clay. Even if the bowl is broken (and the bowl is broken), from the clay and the making and the firing and the pattern, even if the pattern is incomplete (and the pattern is incomplete), let the mind draw its energy. Let the heart complete the pattern.



# SOME STORIES TOLD ALoud

## Some Stories Told Aloud One Evening in the Dry Season at a Summer Place Above Sinshan



Well, Coyote was going along inside the world, you know, and she met old man Bear.

"I'll come with you," Coyote said.

Bear said, "No, please don't come with me. I don't want you. I'm going to get all the bears together and make a war on the human beings. I don't want you along."

Coyote said, "Oh, that's terrible, a terrible thing to do. You'll all destroy each other. You'll be killed, they'll be killed. Don't make war, please don't make war! We should all live in peace and love each other!" All the time she was talking, Coyote was stealing Bear's balls, cutting them off with an obsidian knife she had stolen from the Doctors Lodge, a knife so sharp he never felt it cutting.

When she was done she ran away with Bear's balls in a pouch. She went to where the human people were. They were smoking tobacco and singing, making gunpowder and bullets, cleaning their guns, getting ready for the war with the bears. Coyote went to their war general and said, "Oh, how brave you are, you men of valor, you true warriors! What courage you have, going to war against the bears with only guns for your weapons!"

*Some Stories Told Aloud*

The man got worried and said, "What kind of weapons have they got?"

Coyote said, "They have secret weapons. I can't tell you." But when he was really worried, she told him, "They have huge guns that shoot magic bullets that turn human people into bears. I brought a couple of the bullets." And she showed him the bear's testicles.

All the warriors came and looked and said, "What can we do?"

Coyote said, "Well, what you ought to do is this. Your general should shoot his magic bullets at the bears, and turn them human."

But the general said, "No. Get that coyote out of here, she only makes trouble!" They started shooting at Coyote, and she ran away.

The war began. The bears had their hearts and claws, the humans had tobacco smoke and guns. The humans shot and killed all the bears one after another, all but a few, just four or five who had come late to the war and could get away. They ran away and hid in the wilderness.

There they met Coyote.

"What did you do that for, Coyote?" they said. "Why didn't you help us? All you did was steal the balls off our best warrior!"

Coyote said, "If I could have got the balls off that human man, everything would have been all right. Listen. Those people fuck too often and think too fast. You bears only fuck once a year and sleep too much. You haven't got a chance against them. Stay here with me. I don't think war is the way to live with those people."

So the bears stayed in the wilderness. Most animals stayed in the wilderness with Coyote. Not the ants, though. They wanted to make war with the humans, and they did, and they're still at it.

[Another speaker:] That's right, that's right. And Flea Woman, she's an old friend of Coyote's, you know, they live together. She sends all her little children out on raids into the humans' houses. She says, "Go make 'em itch, go make the children itch a little, itch a little!" [A child listening is tickled by the speaker, and yelps.]

[A third speaker:] That's right, yes. Then, you know, there was that time also in the world, Coyote said to Dog, "I'm angry about those human people winning the war with the bear people. You go to their town and kill that one, that general of theirs."

So Dog agreed. He went to the human town. But the women there in the household where that warrior lived, they gave the dog meat, they took the ticks out of his ears, they patted his head and tamed him. When they said lie down he lay down, when they said come he came. That dog let Coyote down. He joined the human people.



[The conversation drifts for a while, and the young children are getting sleepy. After they are bedded down on the porch of the summerhouse an elderly man sings a two-note chant for a while. This is followed by silence and cricket-song. Then the first speaker begins again.]



That man, you know, that war general who killed the bears, well, he wanted his sons to be war generals like himself, heroes. He thought his hero-soul was in his balls. Maybe he got that idea from Coyote. So he cut them off himself, and put each one into a copper case he'd made, a sphere in two halves threaded to screw together. Then he gave one of these to each of his two sons. He said, "Even if you are half the man I was, it is enough. You will be fearless, you will conquer, you will kill your enemies," he said to them.

But the sons didn't believe that. Each one thought he needed both the balls.

One of them went to the other's house at night with a knife. The other one was waiting for him there with a knife. They fought, they went on fighting and cutting each other until they bled to death. In the morning both of them were dead. The old man came out of his house, he saw blood on the pathways, blood on the steps. People crying, his sons crouched over stiff, dead. He was enraged, he was furious, he shouted, "Give me back my balls!"

But the sons' wives had taken them out. They had put them up on the buzzards' hill with the butchers' leavings, because they had begun to stink. So when the old man was shouting, they said to each other, "What'll we do?" And they washed out the copper holders he'd made, and soldered them shut, or maybe stuck them together with glue, and then they gave them to the old man.

"Here are your precious balls, father-in-law," they said. "You had better sew them back on where they belong. Your sons' children are all girls, they don't want them."

So the old man sewed the copper balls between his legs and went around with them. They made a clanking noise when he walked. He said, "When a true war general is born in this town, I will give him these." But they were nothing, they were empty. When the old man died, they buried those copper balls with his ashes.

[The third speaker:] That's right, that's right, and Coyote came and dug them up.

[The second speaker:] That's right, that's right, and she wore them for earrings when she danced the Moon.



TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The original story about the war with the bears was evidently known to the adults present; the appreciation they showed by murmuring or laughter was for neat turns of phrase. The story about Dog also seemed to be an abridged version of a familiar tale. Whether the story told after the young children had gone to bed was a variation on a familiar theme, or entirely improvised, or something in between, I do not know; my impression was that the listeners did not know what was coming next, but collaborated in the invention and performance by their responses and laughter.

## Shahugoten

As told by Little Bear Woman of Sinsin to the Editor.

There was a Blue Clay family in Ounmain who had a fish child. It was a girl and it was a fish. At one time she was more human, at another time more fish. She breathed both air and water, having lungs and gills. For a long time they kept her from the water, thinking she would get to be more human if she stayed in air. She could not walk well; her legs were weak and she could take only short steps. But once when she was a baby and they were working in the fields, they left her in the shade asleep, and she woke and crawled to the reservoir nearby.

They came back, they looked, the basket was empty. The grandparents, the parents, everybody ran around looking for her. Her brother went up the bank of the reservoir and heard splashing. He looked over the water and saw his sister leaping like a trout. When the others came, she went underwater, and stayed under. They thought she had drowned. They all went into the water, churning up the mud. She hid at the bottom, in the mud and slime, but they found her at last, they saw her glimmering. When they brought her out of the water she gasped and twisted her body until she began breathing air again.

After that they kept her shut in the house, or stayed close by her outdoors. Her older brother carried her about. He was the one who always stayed with her. She did not grow much, she was still very small for a girl when she became adolescent, and her brother could still carry her. She would ask him to take her to the River, and he would answer, "Wait a while, kekoshbi, wait a while yet." He helped to herd the cattle of Unumalin, and while he was herding he would take his sister down to the small creeks and the shallow pools, and she would swim and play there. He would stay up on the bank, keeping watch. Then when she was stronger, when she was becoming adolescent and was learning the Blood Lodge songs, he would take her to the Obsidian heymas and meet her when she came out, and in the evening then he would take her to the River, downstream from town, where it curves around Unumalin Hill making deep pools. She would swim a long way, and he would wait for her. Every evening she swam farther, and he waited longer.

He said, "Kekoshbi, kekoshbiye, they're asking where we go in the evening, why we stay out with the herd so late."



She said, "Takoshbi, matakoshbi, I don't like the songs they sing underground in the First House, the blood songs. I like the water songs they sing in our House. I don't want to come back into the air, into the ground."

He said, "Don't swim away!"

She said, "I'll try not to."

But one evening she swam downriver so far that she tasted the sea through her skin in the water. She came back, she swam back to her brother waiting by the deep pool under the hill. She said, "Matakoshbi, I have to go away. I tasted the blood in the River. I have to go on now."

They put their cheeks together. She slipped back into the water and swam away. The boy went home. He said, "She is gone, she swam to the sea." People thought that he had left her in the River, that he was tired of carrying her and looking after her. They blamed him, saying, "Why did you let her get near the River? Why didn't you keep her on land? Why didn't you stay with her?" He was ashamed and bitterly grieved. When he was with the cattle in the fields and barns he wept with shame and loneliness. He talked to the fish in the River and the sea gulls that came up the Valley in wet weather: "If you see my sister, tell her to come home!"

But it was a long time before she came home. He always walked down by the River in the evening. It was early in the rainy season, in the rain, near dark: he saw something white in the water under the bank of the deep pool. He heard a sound—oshh, ossh—like sea waves. He went down through the willows. She was in the water there, in the shallows by the bank, very white, calling, "Takoshbi! Matakoshbi!" He tried to carry her out of the water, but she said, "Don't! Don't!" She was white and swollen. She gave birth there in the water, in the shallows under the bank: a child, a white child, not a fish but a white boy. The brother took him out of the water and wrapped him in his shirt. She saw that, then she arched up her body and died in the shallow water. People came by; they took the newborn child and his uncle home. They sang the songs for the death, and cremated the death next day in the burning place down by Sebde. They put the ashes in the River, not in the earth. Shahugoten, Seborn, the child was named. Some people of the Obsidian living in Unumalin, people with whitish skin, are grandchildren of the daughter of Shahugoten.



## The Keeper

*Recited by Fletcher, librarian of the Serpentine of Ummalin. This is an example of a "formal" recitation, the performance of a story, as distinct from informal or improvised story-telling. It is obviously a teaching story. It is considered to be true, or factual, although a Chumo version of the same general story begins, "Down across the Valley there in Taahas Touchas . . ."*

Up across the Valley there in that town, Chumo, there was a young woman living in the Third House, a scholar, still wearing undyed clothing; and she was the keeper there, the one who looked after things and put them away and took them out, all the things of the heyimas for the dances and the singing and teaching and giving. There were the vests, the costumes for the Summer dancers, the stones, the paintings on paper, cloth, and wood, the ranges of feathers, the caps, the musical instruments, the tongue-drums and the great wakwa drum, the dance-rattles of gourd and shell, deer hoof and clay, the writings, the books, the sweet and bitter herbs and dried flowers, the carvings and hehlo-no of all kinds, the oils, the tools and instruments of making and repair, and all such valuable and honorable things, and their containers, and their wrappings, and the shelves, closets, and particular places where they were kept in order, clean, seemly, and beautiful; and she was the one who kept them. This was her gift, she did this well, taking pleasure in doing it. When any thing was needed she brought it from its place ready for use. When any thing was given she put it in the right place. When any thing was dirty or worn she cleaned and mended it, and when a thing wore out she put it to a different use. She went on doing this when she came inland and when she married and when she was a mother. It was her chief work, and nobody else did these things for that heyimas but her.

One time a man made a carving in madrone wood, a thing of beauty, a hehlo-no, to give to the House in which the madrone grows. He left it as a gift in the fifth angle of the great room. The keeper saw it after other people had gone home. She picked it up. She liked it, and kept holding it and looking at it, thinking, "This suits me; this is as if it were made for me. This is for me. I will keep this for a while." She took it home to her household, into her room, and put it in her lidded basket, under other things. There it stayed. She did not often look at it, and did not use it.

Another time a man made for the Serpentine a dancing vest of doeskin sewn with leaf embroidery, with ornaments of the long acorns

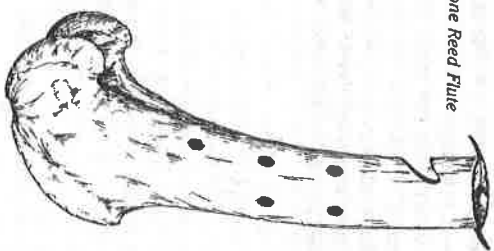
copper-mounted. The keeper was taking it to the closets and chests of the heyimas, and she thought, "This looks as if it would fit me." She tried it on, and kept wearing it as she worked there, thinking, "This fits me; this suits me. This was made for me. Maybe I'll dance in it, next Summer. Somebody else might choose it before me. I'll keep it till the Summer dancing." She took it home and put it in the bottom of her clothes-chest. There it stayed. She did not wear it at the Summer dancing.

Another time a family gave a lot of manzanita-berry powder to the heyimas. She set out some of it in the fifth angle; the rest she took home, thinking, "My son's throat gets dry in the dust of the dry season, and he coughs so badly, he'll be needing manzanita cider then. I'll save this and use it when he needs it." She put it in a glass jar with a stopper in the cellar of her house. There it stayed. She did not make cider of it in the dry season.

Another time a woman gave a deer-legbone flute that had been a long time in the Second House, very old; many times it had played the four-note heya. The keeper put it with the other flutes of the Third House, but she kept going back and taking it out of the box, moving it on the shelf, thinking, "It doesn't belong here; it is too old to play. Careless people play these flutes—children, musicians. This is too old and beautiful to treat like an ordinary flute." She took it home and put it in her lidded basket. There it stayed. No one played it.

Another time a man brought a piece of combread. He was very old and muddledheaded and the piece of bread was old too, hard and dry, he couldn't chew it. He broke off the piece he had tried to bite off and

Bone Reed Flute



dropped that, and put the rest in the fifth angle, saying, "Maybe some young person with strong jaws can eat that." The keeper found it there. She dropped it to the floor and when she swept the great room of the heyimas she gathered the bread up with the dust, and took all she had swept up the ladder, and let it fall in the dirt by the roof of the heyimas.

That afternoon, that evening, she got sick. The next day she was very sick. She had terrible pains in her stomach, her hands, her anus, her teeth. They held a bringing-in for her, but she did not come with the singers. The doctors cared for her but nothing helped her, she was in more pain all the time, and swelling up, her hands and feet swelling, her belly and face swelling.

A cousin of hers in her House who was a singing doctor came to care for her and sing to her. He watched her carefully as he sang. She groaned and did not listen. When the song was finished her cousin said, "Cousin, a song is its singing."

He went home. She thought about what he had said; she had heard that. She kept thinking about it. By now she was wasted away and swollen up, and doubled over with the pains in her belly. She wanted to vomit and could not, she wanted to shit and could not. She thought, "What am I dying for?" She thought about the things she had kept. She crawled over to her lidded basket and looked for the deer-bone flute and the madrone-wood carving. Nothing was in the bottom of the basket but some clods of dirt. She looked in her clothes-chest for the embroidered vest. Nothing was there under the other clothes but a dirty rag. She went down to the basement to her shelves, looking for the cider powder. The jar had dirt in it, dust in it. She went to the heyimas, dragging herself, crawling, crying out, "Where is it? Where is it?" She crawled in the dirt around the outside of the heyimas, scraping in the dirt with her fingernails, crying, "Where is it?" People thought she had gone crazy. She found a piece of the cornbread, a crumb of it; maybe it was just a crumb of dirt and she thought it was the cornbread. She ate it. She lay still then. They took her home, and sang for her, and she listened to the singing. She got better; she got well. Other people looked after the things in the heyimas after that.



## Dried Mice

*A story told to a group of children on a rainy day in the  
Serpentine heyimas of Sinshan, by Kingsnake, a man in his  
seventies.*

Coyote had this child she got somewhere, not her own child; it was a human baby she stole somewhere. Maybe she saw a baby nobody was looking after, and said, "I'll take that baby home with me." So she did. Her own children played with it. She nursed it, it got fat on coyote milk. It got fatter than the coyote pups, they were all ribs and tail. But they didn't care. They played with the human child, they jumped at it and it jumped at them, they nipped it and it nipped them, they all slept together in Coyote's bed, in Coyote's house. But the child was always cold there, not having any fur. It kept whimpering and shivering. Coyote said, "What's wrong?"

"I'm cold."

"Grow fur!"

"I can't."

"Well, what can I do?"

"You ought to make a fire, that's what people do when they're cold."

"Oh! Good!" Coyote said, and she went right off to some place where human people lived. She waited till they lighted a fire, then she ran into the house, grabbed a stick of burning wood, and ran into the hills with it. The sparks flew behind her, the fire caught the dry grass. A fire started behind Coyote, a grassfire. By the time she got home the fire was roaring on ten hills. Her family all had to run, they had to run like crazy, and jump into the river! There they all were in the river with only their noses out. "Hey," Coyote says, "are you warm now?"

After they came out of the river everything was burned on one side. The rain came and it got cold, it was a cold winter. They lived in a new den on the other side of that river. The child was even colder there, but it didn't want to ask Coyote to light another fire. It thought, "I won't stay here with these coyotes in this cold house any more. I'll go where my kind of people are and live that way." So in the daytime it got up, in the middle of the day when the coyotes were sleeping, and it took some venison jerky and some dried mice, that's what there was to eat in that house, and started off. All day it walked along, walking along all day, running sometimes, to get a long way away from Coyote, clear away from that house. At the end of the day, after sunset, the child looked for a place to hide and sleep. It found a ledge of rock, and made a bed with fir twigs, and lay down there and went to sleep.

Coyote was waking up. She was stretching and yawning. Her pups said, "Hey! Where's Two-Legs?" She looked around. She looked over in the corner of her house and saw the child sleeping on the shelf where she kept things. "There, on the shelf over there," she said. "Why is that child sleeping there, I wonder?" They all went out to hunt.

The child got up next morning, and all day long it ran and walked, all day long, going a long, long way, and at night it hid in a cave to sleep. The coyotes woke up. "Hey! Where's Two-Legs?" She looked around her house. "There, in my basket, my sewing basket. Why is that child sleeping there, I wonder?" So they went on out.

The next day the child came to a town of human people. They all kept away from it because it looked strange to them at first, and some people threw rocks at it to drive it away, but it stayed there. It hid under the porch of a house, and at night it came up and slept on the porch, near the door. When the people who lived in the house saw it there they were sorry for it, and brought it inside so it could sleep near the fire. In their house the coyotes were waking up. The young coyotes were looking around. "Where's Two-Legs?" — "Oh! my child is gone! My child has gone to another house!" Coyote went outside and cried and howled all night. "Bring me my dried mice back!" So they say. That's what she says when she comes around outside town in the moonlight, she's saying, "Bring me my dried mice back!" So they say.

NOTE:

p. 63. some dried mice: tūpūde ūt gosūi

## Dira

*Told by her husband Red Bull to a group of children and young adolescents in the Obsidian heyminas.*

Heya hey hey.

Heya hey hey, in that time that place, in the dark cold time, the dark cold place, she was going along, this woman, a human woman, walking in the hills, looking for something to eat. She was looking for brodiaea and calochortus bulbs before they bloomed, and

putting out snares for brush rabbit, and gathering anything that could be food, because her people were hungry and so was she. Those were times when people had to work all day for enough to eat, times when even so they didn't have enough to eat, and people died of hunger, human and animal, they died of hunger and cold, so they say.

She was hunting and gathering in the hills, then, and started down into a canyon where she thought she saw some cattail down by the creek. She got into buckbrush and scrub oak and thorn, and had to push her way along; there weren't any deer trails, not even rabbit trails. She was very dark, like it was going to rain. She thought, "Oh, before I get out of this brush, this time of year, I'll be covered with ticks!" She kept brushing at her neck and arms and feeling in her hair for ticks, trying to keep them from sticking to her. She didn't find any cattails. There was nothing to eat down in the canyon. She started to go along downstream, pushing through that thick underbrush, tearing her shirt and scratching her skin on the buckbrush and the thorn. She came into a place where the yellow broom grew very tall and close together. Nothing else grew there. The broom was half dead and grey-looking, without flowers yet. She pushed her way into the broom thicket, and ahead of her there, in the middle of the thicket, she saw a person standing. It was a wide, thin, dark person, with a little head, and one hand without fingers, just two prongs, like pliers or pincers. It stood there waiting. It had no eyes, they say.

She stopped; she stood still. Then she tried to back away very quietly as she had come. But the broom thicket had closed behind her and it made a lot of noise when she tried to go back. She could only go forward quietly. The person stood still, not moving, not looking, so still she began not to be sure it was alive. She thought, "Maybe I can get past it." She went forward very quietly, moving softly, smoothly, quickly. The waiting person didn't move. She saw how thin and flat it was, dry-looking, and thought it must be something that had never been alive. She came on past it. She was beside it. She passed it and now her back was to it. It jumped, then, it jumped, and caught her with its gripping hand at the back of her neck. It held her and said, "Take me home with you!"

She struggled and said, "Let me go!" She tried to get free but it held on. She was strangling. It held tighter and tighter, and she said, "All right, I'll take you home with me!"

"That's good," the person said. It let go of her then. When she could turn and look at it, it looked like a man, a human being, dark and thin, with a small head and small eyes, but with two arms and two hands with thumb and fingers, and all seeming to be the way a human being should be. "Go on," the man said, "and I'll follow." So she went on, and the man followed.





She came to where she lived, a little town, just a few houses, a few families, somewhere in that dark, cold valley. She came there, the man following, and her people said, "Who is this with you?"

She said, "A hungry man."

They said, "He certainly is thin. He can share what we have to eat." She tried to say, "No! Send him away!"—but when she started to speak her throat closed and she couldn't breathe, as if he were still holding her by the neck. She could say nothing against him.

They asked the man what he was called, and he answered, "Dira."

The woman had to open her door to Dira. He came in and sat down by her fire. She had to share the food she had brought for her children and her mother with him. There wasn't much: a few bulbs and greens, that was all she had found. They were all still hungry when they had eaten, but Dira said, "Ah, that was good! That was fine!" And he seemed not so thin already.

He asked the woman, "Where is your husband?"

She said, "He died last year."

Dira said, "I'll take his place."

She tried to say, "No!" but she couldn't: her throat tightened till she thought her head would burst, and she could not breathe, until she said, "Yes."

So Dira was her husband, and she made the best of it.

Her mother said after a while, "This husband you picked up in the woods, he doesn't do any work."

"He's still weak from starving so long," she said.

People in town said, "Why doesn't Dira farm, or hunt, or gather? He stays in the house all day and night."

She said, "He's ill."

They said, "Maybe he was ill when he came here, but look at him now!"

Because he had become quite fat—every day he got fatter, and his skin was ruddy instead of dark.

"He's fat, and you and your family are all thinner than ever—how is that?" they asked her. But she could not say. When she tried to speak against Dira, even when he was not there with her, she strangled. The tears came into her eyes. She said, "I don't know."



They had planted gardens, but the summer was dark and cold. The seeds rotted in the ground. There was little to hunt; there were not many Blue Clay animals, because they too were starving and sick; there were few Obsidian animals. Nobody had food. The woman's children grew weak and sick, with big, swollen bellies. She wept, but her husband laughed. "See, they're like me!" he said. "We all have big bellies!" He ate everything: he grew fatter, thicker, redder, every day. The family had one cow, and there was enough grass to keep her fit; it was her milk that kept the children alive. Dira went out one day into the fields. The woman said, "There, see, my husband is going to work!" He went to where the cow was grazing, and she said, "He's going to look after our sister there." But what he did was drink the cow's blood, sucking it. He did this every day, and the cow could not give milk; he went on doing it, and she lay down and died. He butchered her there in the field and came home carrying the meat. He had to go back and forth several times for it all. "See how hard my husband works!" the woman said. There were tears running down her face. They saw that, her townspeople.

Her children had grown very weak without milk. The husband, Dira, always spoke kindly to them, but he gave them no meat. He ate it all. Sometimes he would say to them, the children, their mother, their grandmother, "Here, don't you want this meat? You don't want this food?" But when he said that, their throats would tighten and close, so they could only shake their heads; then he would eat the meat, smiling too. Dira was so fat he could no longer get up; he sat by the fire all day and night. His belly was huge, a huge ball. His skin was tight and pale red all over. His eyes were covered with fat. His arms and legs were stubs coming out of that great ball of fatness. His wife and her mother stayed beside the dying child.

The people of the town spoke together. They talked awhile, and decided to kill Dira. The men were angry and said, "A knife across that throat, a bullet in that belly!" But there was a lame woman, a visionary, who said, "Not that way, not that way. This is not a man!"

"But we are going to kill him," they said.

"If you kill him that way, his wife and her family will die with him. You must not spill all that blood in him. It is their blood," she said.

"Then we'll suffocate him," one of the men said.

"That is the way," the lame woman said.

They went, all of them, to the house. The door was shut. They pushed it open and came in. The grandmother and mother and child lay like sticks of wood, like old bones on the floor, too weak to sit up, dying. The husband sat by the fire like a great red ball of skin. When he saw the people he changed into his own form, and put out his pliers hand, but he was too fat to move, and couldn't catch them. They had